This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

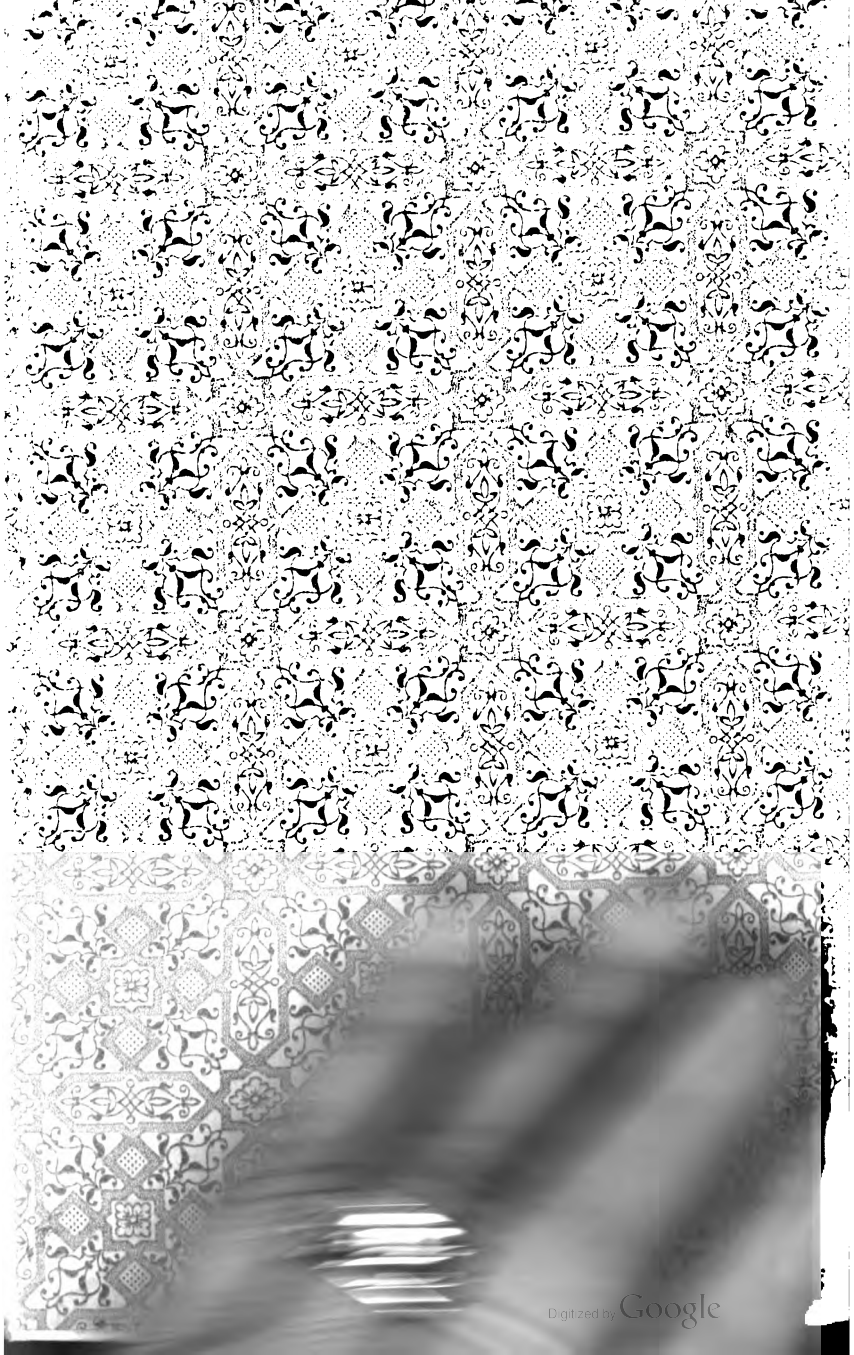
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

My patients

George Manville Fenn


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

600073954Y

Digitized by Google

POPULAR EDITION of MANVILLE FENN'S NOVELS.

THE TIMES says :—"*Mr. Manville Fenn is one of the rare novelists who practise a delicate profession conscientiously. His successive books show unmistakable progress.*"

NOW READY.

DUTCH THE DIVER; OR, A MAN'S MISTAKE . 2s.

COBWEB'S FATHER, and Other Stories. Being Friends I have Made . . . . . 2s.

MY PATIENTS. Being the Notes of a Navy Surgeon and Adventures of Working Men . . . . . 2s.

POVERTY CORNER . . . . . 2s.

THE PARSON O' DUMFORD . . . . . 2s.

Cassell & Company, Limited; and all Booksellers.

Digitized by Google

"WITH A REPROACHFUL LOOK AT JENNY I ROSE TO GO"—(see p. 61).

Digitized by Google

MY PATIENTS.

BEING

The Notes of a Working Surgeon, and Adventures of Working Men.

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "COBWEB'S FATHER," "DUTCH THE DIVER," "THE PARSON O' DUMFORD," &c. &c.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:
LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

251. h. 333.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

My Patients 1

CHAPTER II.

My Patient the Stoker 6

CHAPTER III.

My Patient the Well-Sinker 20

CHAPTER IV.

My Underground Patient 28

CHAPTER V.

My Black Patient 41

CHAPTER VI.

My Sheffield Patient 54

CHAPTER VII.

My Non-Striking Patient 71

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

My Patient the Driver 80

CHAPTER IX.

My Patient at the Fire 90

CHAPTER X.

My Patients at the Mine 98

CHAPTER XI.

My Scalded Patient 115

CHAPTER XII.

My Patient the Captain 129

CHAPTER XIII.

My Patient the Quarryman 143

CHAPTER XIV.

My Patients the Fishermen 160

CHAPTER XV.

My Patient the Porter 170

CHAPTER XVI.

My Patient the Carpenter 182

CHAPTER XVII.

My Patient the Warehouseman 195

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII.

PAGE
My Patient in the River Police 207

CHAPTER XIX.

My Patient the Emigrant 220

CHAPTER XX.

My Emigrant Patient's Friend 247

CHAPTER XXI.

My Patient the Prison Warder 256

CHAPTER XXII.

My Patient the Sailor 264

CHAPTER XXIII.

My Patient who never Pays—Myself 274

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ADVENTURES OF WORKING MEN.

FROM THE

Note-Book of a Working Surgeon.

CHAPTER I.

MY PATIENTS.

I HAVE had patients enough in a busy life as a working surgeon, you may be sure, but of all that I have had, young or old, give me your genuine, simple-hearted working man; for whether he be down with an ordinary sickness or an extraordinary accident, he is always the same — enduring, forbearing, hopeful, and with that thorough faith in his medical man that does so much towards helping on a cure.

Wealthy patients as a rule do not possess that faith in their doctor. They always seem to expect that a disease which has been coming on, perhaps, for months,

Digitized by Google

can be cured right off in a few hours by a touch of the doctor's hand. If this result does not follow, and I may tell you at once it never does—unless it be in a case of toothache, and a tooth is drawn—the patient is peevish and fretful, the doctor is looked upon as unskilful, and, money being no object, the chances are that before the doctor or surgeon has had a chance, another practitioner is called in.

On the other hand, a quiet stalwart working man comes to you with a childlike faith and simplicity; he is at one with you; and he helps his cure by his simple profound belief in your skill.

A great deal of working-class doctoring and surgery has fallen to my lot, for fate threw me into a mixed practice. Sooner than wait at home idle for patients who might never come, I have made a point of taking any man's practice *pro. tem.*, while the owner was ill, or away upon a holiday, and so improved my own knowledge better than I should have done by reading ever so hard. The consequence is that I have been a good deal about the country, and amongst a great variety of people, and the result of my experience is that your genuine working man, if he has been unspoiled by publicans, and those sinners, the demagogues, who are always putting false notions into his head, is a thoroughly sterling individual. That is the rule. I need not quote the exceptions, for there are black sheep enough among them, even as there are among other classes. Take him all in all, the British workman is a being of whom we may well be proud, and the better he is treated the brighter the colours in which he will come out.

Of course he has his weak points; we all have them,

Digitized by Google

and very unpleasant creatures we should be without. A man all strong points is the kind of being to avoid. Have nothing to do with him. Depend upon it the finest—the most human of God's creatures, are those who have their share of imperfections mingled with he good that is in every one more or less.

They are men, these workers, who need the surgeon more than ordinary people, for too often their lives are the lives of soldiers fighting in the battle of life; and many are the wounded and slain.

I used at one time—from no love of the morbid, please bear in mind, but from genuine desire to study my profession—to think that I should like to go out as an army surgeon, and be with a regiment through some terrible war. For it seemed to me that nothing could do more towards making a professional man prompt and full of resources than being called upon to help his suffering fellow-creatures—shot down, cut down, trampled beneath horses' feet, blown up, bayoneted, hurt in one of the thousand ways incidental to warfare, besides suffering from the many diseases that follow in an army's train. But I very soon learned that there was no need for any such adventure, for I could find ample demands on such poor skill as I possessed by devoting myself to the great army of toilers fighting in our midst. Talk of demands upon a man's energy and skill; calls upon his nerve; needs for promptness and presence of mind! There are plenty such in our every-day life; for, shocking as it may sound, the tale of killed and wounded every week in busy England is terribly heavy. Go to some manufacturing town where steam hisses and pants, and there is the throb and whirr of machinery from morn till night—yes, and onward

Digitized by Google

still from night to morn—where the furnaces are never allowed to slacken—go there and visit the infirmary, and you will find plenty of wounded in the course of the year. You have the same result, too, in the agricultural districts, where, peaceful as is the labourer's pursuit, he cannot avoid mishaps with horses, waggons, threshing-machines, even with his simple working tools. In busy London itself the immense variety of calls upon the surgeon's skill leaves him little to desire in the way of experience.

Many years of shere toil have caused a kind of friendship to grow up between me and the working man. In fact I consider myself a working man, and a hard-worker. I have told you how I like him for a patient, but I have not told you of the many good qualities that I have found, too often lying latent in his breast. Those I will touch upon incidentally in the course of these pages, for years ago the fancy came upon me to make a kind of note-book of particular cases, principally for my own amusement. Not a surgical or medical note-book, but a few short jottings of the peculiarities of the cases, and these short jottings grew into long ones, so that now I present them to the reader as so many sketches of working men—adventures, that is to say, met with in their particular avocations.

Sometimes I have been called in to attend the workman for the special case of which his little narrative treats, for I have thought it better for the most part to let him tell his story in his own words; and now I come to look through my collection—the gatherings of many years—I find that I have a strange variety of incident, some of which in their peril and danger will

Digitized by Google

show those who have never given a thought to such a subject, how many are the risks to which the busy ants of our great hill are exposed, and how often they go about their daily tasks with their lives in their hands.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

MY PATIENT THE STOKER.

I WOULD not wish for a better specimen of faith and confidence than was shown by one of my patients, Edward Brown, a stoker, with whose little narrative I will commence my sketches.

"Ah! doctor," he said one day, "I wish you had had to do with me when I came back from the East."

"Why?" I said, and went on dressing a very serious injury he had received to one hand, caused by his crushing it between a large piece of coal and the edge of the furnace door.

"Because I should have got better much quicker if I had known you."

"Perhaps not," I said, "your own medical man may have done his best."

"Perhaps he did," was the reply. "But, lor! hard down I was just then. It brings it all up again—those words."

"What words?" I said. "There, don't let that bandage be touched by anyone."

Digitized by Google

"'In the midst of life we are in death.'"

"Why, Brown!" I exclaimed.

"Yes sir, those were the words—'In the midst of life we are in death.' And they sounded so quiet and solemn, that Mary and I stopped short close to the old-fashioned gate at the little churchyard; and then, as if we moved and thought together, we went in softly to the funeral, and stood at a little distance, me with my hat off and Mary with her head bent down, till the service was over.

"There it all is again as I'm telling it to you, come back as fresh and clear as if I was looking at it now: a nice little old-fashioned church, with a stone wall round the yard, where the graves lay pretty thick and close, but all looking green and flowery and old, a great clump of the biggest and oldest yew-trees I ever saw, and a tall thick hedge separating the churchyard from the clergyman's house. The sun was shining brightly, turning the moss-covered roofs of the church and vicarage into gold; from the trees close by came the faint twittering of birds, and away past the village houses bathed in the bright afternoon sunshine there were the fields of crimson clover, and the banks full of golden broom and gorse. Over all was a sense of such peace and silence that it seemed as if there was nothing terrible, only a quiet sadness in the funeral, with its few mourners round the open grave, and the grey-haired clergyman standing by; and last of all, when Mary and I went up and looked into the grave, and read on the coffin-plate, 'Aged 77,' one couldn't help feeling that the poor soul had only gone to sleep tired with a long life.

"It was my fancy perhaps, but as we strolled round

Digitized by Google

that churchyard, and read a tombstone here and a board there, it seemed as if no sooner had the parson gone in to take off his surplice, and the mourners left the churchyard, than the whole place woke up again into busy life. A chaffinch came and jerked out its bit of a song in one of the yews, the Guinea-fowls in a farm close by set up their loud crying, the geese shrieked on the green, and creaking, and rattling and bumping, there came along a high-filled waggon of the sweetest hay that ever was caught in loose handfuls by the boughs of the trees, and then fell softly back into the road.

"'We were very quiet, Mary and I, as we strolled out of the churchyard, down one of the lanes; and then crossing a stile, we went through a couple of fields, and sat down on another stile, with the high hedge on one side of us and the meadow, that they were beginning to mow at the other end, one glorious bed of flowers and soft feathery grass.

"'"'Polly,' I says at last, breaking the silence, 'ain't this heavenly?'

"'"'And you feel better?' she says, laying her hand on mine.

"'"'Better!' I says, taking a long draught of the soft sweet-scented air, and filling my chest—'better, old girl! I feel as if I was growing backwards into a boy.'

"'"'And you fifty last week!' she says.

"'"'Yes,' I says, smiling, 'and you forty-seven next week.' And then we sat thinking for a bit.

"'"'Polly,' I says at last, as I sat there drinking in that soft breeze, and feeling it give me strength, 'it's worth being ill only to feel as I do now.'

"'For you see I'd been very bad, else I dare say I'm

Digitized by Google

not the man to go hanging about churchyards and watching funerals: I'm a stoker, and my work lies in steamers trading to the East. I'd come home from my last voyage bad with fever, caught out in one of those nasty hot bad-smelling ports—been carried home to die, as my mates thought; and it was being like this, and getting better, that had set me thinking so seriously, and made me so quiet; not that I was ever a noisy sort of man, as any one who knows me will say. And now, after getting better, the doctor had said I must go into the country to get strength; so as there was no more voyaging till I was strong, there was nothing for it but to leave the youngsters under the care of the eldest girl and a neighbour, and come and take lodgings out in this quiet Surrey village.

"Polly never thought I should get better, and one time no more did I; for about a month before this time, as I lay hollow-eyed and yellow on the bed, knowing, too, how bad I looked—for I used to make young Dick bring me the looking-glass every morning—the doctor came as usual, and like a blunt Englishman I put it to him flat.

"'Doctor,' I says, 'you don't think I shall get better?' and I looked him straight in the face.

"'Oh, come, come, my man!' he says, smiling, 'we never look at the black side like that.'

"'None of that, doctor,' I says; 'out with it like a man. I can stand it: I've been expecting to be drowned or blown up half my life, so I shan't be scared at what you say.'

'"Well, my man,' he says, 'your symptoms are of a very grave nature. You see the fever had undermined you before you came home, and unless——'

Digitized by Google

"'All right, doctor,' I says; 'I understand: you mean that unless you can get a new plate in the boiler, she won't stand another voyage.'

"'Oh, come! we won't look upon it as a hopeless case,' he says; 'there's always hope;' and after a little more talk, he shook hands and went away.

"Next day, when he came, I had been thinking it all over, and was ready for him. I don't believe I was a bit better; in fact, I know I was drifting fast, and I saw it in his eyes as well.

"I waited till he had asked me his different questions, and then just as he was getting up to go, I asked him to sit down again.

"'Polly, my dear,' I says, 'I just want a few words with the doctor;' and she put her apron up to her eyes and went out, closing the door after her very softly, while the doctor looked at me curious-like, and waited for me to speak.

"'Doctor,' I says, 'you've about given me up. There, don't shake your head, for I know. Now don't you think I'm afraid to die, for I don't believe I am; but look here: there's seven children downstairs, and if I leave my wife a widow with the few pounds I've been able to save, what's to become of them? Can't you pull me through?'

"'My dear fellow,' he says, 'honestly I've done everything I can for your case.'

"'That's what you think, doctor,' I says, 'but look here: I've been at sea thirty years, and in seven wrecks. It's been like dodging death with me a score of times. Why, I pulled my wife there regularly out of the hands of death, and I'm not going to give up now. I've been——'

Digitized by Google

"'Stop, stop,' he says gently. 'You're exciting yourself.'

"'Not a bit,' I says, though my voice was quite a whisper. 'I've had this over all night, and I've come to think I must be up and doing my duty.'

"'But, my good man——' he began.

"'Listen to me, doctor,' I says. 'A score of times I might have given up and been drowned, but I made a fight for it and was saved. Now I mean to make a fight for it here, for the sake of the wife and bairns. I don't mean to die, doctor, without a struggle. I believe this here, that life's given to us all as a treasure to keep; we might throw it away by our own folly at any time, but there's hundreds of times when we may preserve it, and we never know whether we can save it till we try. Give's a drink of that water.'

"He held the glass to my lips, and I took a big draught and went on, he seeming all the time to be stopping to humour me in my madness.

"'That's better, doctor,' I says. 'Now look here, sir, speaking as one who has sailed the seas, it's a terrible stormy time with me; there's a lee shore close at hand, the fires are drowned out, and unless we can get up a bit of sail, there's no chance for me. Now then, doctor, can you get up a bit of sail?'

"'I'll go and send you something that will quiet you,' he said, rising.

"'Thank ye, doctor,' I says, smiling to myself. 'And now look here,' I says, 'I'm not going to give up till the last; and when that last comes, and the ship's going down, why, I shall have a try if I can't swim to safety. If that fails, and I can really feel that it is to be, why, I hope I shall go down into the great

Digitized by Google

deep calmly, like a hopeful man, praying that Somebody above will forgive me all I've done amiss, and stretch out His fatherly hand to my little ones at home.'

"He went away, and I dropped asleep, worn out with my exertion.

"When I woke, Polly was standing by the bedside watching me, with a bottle and glass on the little table.

"As soon as she saw my eyes open, she shook up the stuff, and poured it into a wine-glass.

"'Is that what the doctor sent?' I says.

"'Yes, dear; you were to take it directly.'

"'Then I shan't take it,' I says. 'He's give me up, and that stuff's only to keep me quiet. Polly, you go and make me some beef-tea, and make it strong.'

"She looked horrified, poor old girl, and was going to beg me to take hold of the rotten life-belt he'd sent me, when I held out my shaking hand for it, took the glass, and let it tilt over—there was only about a couple of teaspoonfuls in it—and the stuff fell on the carpet.

"I saw the tears come in her eyes, but she said nothing—only put down the glass, and ran out to make the beef-tea.

"The doctor didn't come till late next day, and I was lying very still and drowsy, half asleep like, but I was awake enough to hear him whisper to Polly, 'Sinking fast;' and I heard her give such a heart-broken sob, that as the next great wave came on the sea where I was floating, I struck out with all my might, rose over it, and floated gently down the other side.

"For the next four days—putting it as a drowning

Digitized by Google

"STANDING BY THE BEDSIDE"—(p. 12).

Digitized by Google

man striving for his life like a true-hearted fellow—it was like great foaming waves coming to wash over me, but the shore still in sight, and me trying hard to reach it.

"And it was a grim, hard fight: a dozen times I could have given up, folded my arms, and said good-bye to the dear old watching face safe on shore; but a look at that always cheered me, and I fought on again and again, till at last the sea seemed to go down, and, in utter weariness, I turned on my back to float restfully with the tide bearing me shorewards, till I touched the sands, crept up them, and fell down worn out, to sleep in the warm sun—safe!

"That's a curious way of putting it, you may say, but it seems natural to me to mix it up with the things of seagoing life, and the manner in which I've seen so many fight hard for their lives. It was just like striving in the midst of a storm to me, and when at last I did fall into a deep sleep, I felt surprised-like to find myself lying in my own bed, with Polly watching by me; and when I stretched out my hand, and took hers, she let loose what she had kept hidden from me before, and, falling on her knees by my bedside, she sobbed for very joy.

"'As much beef-tea and brandy as you can get him to take,' the doctor says, that afternoon; and it wasn't long before I got from slops to solids, and then was sent, as I told you, into the country to get strong, while the doctor got no end of praise for the cure he had made.

"I never said a word though, even to Polly, for he did his best; but I don't think any medicine would have cured me then.

Digitized by Google

"I was saying a little while back that I pulled my wife regularly out of the hands of death, and of course that was when we were both quite young; though, for the matter of that, I don't feel much different, and can't well see the change. That was in one of the Cape steamers, when I first took to stoking. They were little ramshackle sort of boats in those days, and how it was more weren't lost puzzles me. It was more due to the weather than the make or finding of the ships, I can tell you, that they used to steer their way safe to port; and yet the passengers, poor things, knowing no better, used to take passage, ay, and make a voyage too, from which they never got back.

"Well, I was working on board a steamer as they used to call the *Equator*, heavy laden and with about twenty passengers on board. We started down Channel and away with all well, till we got right down off the west coast of Africa, when there came one of the heaviest storms I was ever in. Even for a well-found steamer, such as they can build to-day, it would have been a hard fight; but with our poor shaky wooden tub, it was a hopeless case from the first.

"Our skipper made a brave fight of it, though, and tried hard to make for one of the ports; but, bless you! what can a man do when, after ten days' knocking about, the coals run out, and the fires, that have been kept going with wood and oil, and everything that can be thrust into the furnaces, are drowned; when the paddle-wheels are only in the way, every bit of sail set is blown clean out of the bolt-ropes, and at last the ship begins to drift fast for a lee shore?

"That was our case, and every hour the sea seemed to get higher, and the wind more fierce, while I heard

Digitized by Google

from more than one man how fast the water was gaining below.

"My mate and I didn't want any telling, though. We'd been driven up out of the stoke-hole like a pair of drowned rats, and came on deck to find the bulwarks ripped away, and the sea every now and then leaping aboard, and washing the lumber about in all directions.

"The skipper was behaving very well, and he kept us all at the pumps, turn and turn in spells, but we might as well have tried to pump the sea dry; and when, with the water gaining fast, we told him what we thought, he owned as it was no use, and we gave up.

"We'd all been at it, crew and passengers, about forty of us altogether, including the women—five of them they were, and they were all on deck, lashed in a sheltered place, close to the poop. Very pitiful it was to see them fighting hard at first and clinging to the side, but only to grow weaker, half-drowned as they were; and I saw two sink down at last and hang drooping-like from their lashings, dead, for not a soul could do them a turn.

"I was holding on by the shrouds when the mate got to the skipper's side, and I saw in his blank white face what he was telling him. Of course we couldn't hear his words in such a storm, but we didn't want to, for we knew well enough he was saying—

"'She's sinking!'

"Next moment there was a rush made for the boats, and two of the passengers cut loose a couple of the women; place was made for them before the first boat was too full, and she was lowered down, cast off, and a big wave carried her clear of the steamer. I saw her

Digitized by Google

for a moment on the top of the ridge, and then she plunged down the other side out of our sight—and that of everybody else; for how long she lived, who can say? She was never picked up or heard of again.

"Giving a bit of a cheer, our chaps turned to the next, and were getting in when there came a wave like a mountain, ripped her from the davits, and when I shook the water from my eyes, there she was hanging by one end, stove in, and the men who had tried to launch her gone—skipper and mate as well.

"There were only seven of us now, and I could see besides the three women lashed to the side, and only one of them was alive; and for a bit no one moved, everybody being stunned-like with horror; but there came a lull, and feeling that the steamer was sinking under our feet, I shouted out to the boys to come on, and we ran to the last boat, climbed in, and were casting off, when I happened to catch sight of the women lashed under the bulwarks there.

"'Hold hard!' I roars, for I saw one of them wave her hand.

"'Come on, you fool,' shouts my mate, 'she's going down!'

"I pray I may never be put to it again like that, with all a man's selfish desire for life fighting against him. For a moment I shut my eyes, and they began to lower; but I was obliged to open them again, and as I did so, I saw a wild scared face, with long wet hair clinging round it, and a pair of little white hands were stretched out to me as if for help.

"'Hold hard!' I shouts.

"'No, no,' roared out two or three, 'there isn't a moment;' and as the boat was being lowered from

Digitized by Google

the davits, I made a jump, caught the bulwarks with my hands, and climbed back on board, just as the boat kissed the water, was unhooked, and floated away.

"Then as I crept, hand-over-hand, to the girl's side, whipped out my knife, and was cutting her loose, while her weak arms clung to me, I felt a horrible feeling of despair come over me, for the boat was leaving us; and I knew what a coward I was at heart, as I had to fight with myself so as not to leave the girl to her fate, and leap overboard to swim for my life. I got the better of it, though—went down on my knees, so as not to see the boat, and got the poor trembling, clinging creature loose.

"'Now, my lass,' I says, 'quick'—and I raised her up—'hold on by the side while I make fast a rope round you.'

"And then I stood up to hail the boat—the boat as warn't there, for in those brief moments she must have capsized, and we were alone on the sinking steamer, which now lay in the trough of the sea.

"As soon as I got over the horror of the feeling, a sort of stony despair came over me; but when I saw that little pale appealing face at my side, looking to me for help, that brought the manhood back, and in saying encouraging things to her, I did myself good.

"My first idea was to make something that would float us, but I gave that up directly, for I could feel that I was helpless; and getting the poor girl more into shelter, I took a bit of tobacco in a sort of stolid way, and sat down with a cork life-buoy over my arm, one which I had cut loose from where it had hung forgotten behind the wheel.

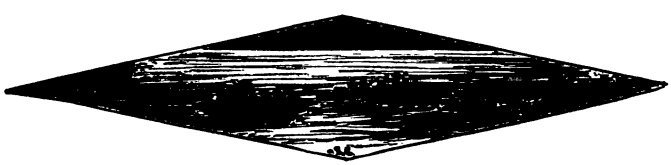
"But I never used it, for the storm went down fast,

Digitized by Google

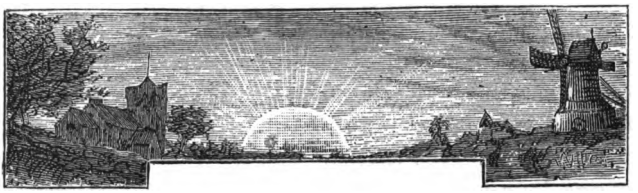
and the steamer floated still, waterlogged, for three days, when we were picked up by a passing vessel, half-starved, but hoping. And during that time my companion had told me that she was the attendant of one of the lady passengers on board; and at last, when we parted at the Cape, she kissed my hand, and called me her hero, who had saved her life—poor grimey me, you know!

"We warn't long, though, before we met again, for somehow we'd settled that we'd write; and a twelvemonth after, Mary was back in England, and my wife. That's why I said I took her like out of the hands of death, though in a selfish sort of way, being far, you know, from perfect. But what I say, speaking as Edward Brown, stoker, is this: Make a good fight of it, no matter how black things may look, and leave the rest to Him."

He nodded gravely at me, placed his bandaged hand in the sling I had contrived, and went away without another word.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER III.

MY PATIENT THE WELL-SINKER

"IT'S no more than I expected, doctor," said my patient, Goodsell, a stern, hard-featured, grey-haired man, with keen, yet good-natured eyes; and he shifted his head a little on the pillow to look at me. "Good job it's no worse, ain't it?"

"It is a mercy you were not killed," I said.

"You're right, doctor," he replied, smiling. "Two inches to the left, and the iron rim of the bucket would have broken my skull instead of my shoulder, eh? and then my boy could have carried on the business."

"You take it very philosophically," I said.

"To be sure, doctor. Why not? A man must die some time; and he may just as well die at work, as a miserable creature in bed. I expects to die by my business, straightforward and honourable. The pitcher that goes oftenest to the well is sure to be broken at last," he added, with a laugh. "I'm a pitcher always going to the well, and shall be broken at last.

"I've been a well-sinker ever since I was quite a lad; my father was a well-sinker afore me, and he got sent to sleep with the foul air at the bottom of a well, and

Digitized by Google

never got waked again; and I, being the eldest of six, and only fourteen, had to set at it to keep the family, while father's master, being a kind-hearted sort of man, took me on, and gave me as good wages as he could, for my father had been a sort of favourite of his, from being a first-class, steady workman. My grandfather was a well-sinker too, and he got buried alive, he did, poor old chap, through a fall of earth; while his father —my great-grandfather, you know—was knocked on the head by the sinker's bucket; for the rope broke when they were drawing it up full of earth, and it fell on the old gentleman, and ended him. I ain't got killed yet, I ain't; but my turn'll come some day, I suppose, for it's in our profession, you know. But then you must have water; and ours is a very valuable trade—so what is to be will be, and what's the good of fretting? It don't do to be always fidgeting about danger in your way through life, but what we have to do is to go straight ahead, and do our duty, and trust to Providence for the rest.

"Now, after all these years—and I'm 'most fifty, you know—I never look down a well without having the creeps, and I never go down one without having the creeps; for they're queer, dark, echoing, shadowy, grave-like sort of holes, and one thinks of the depth, and the darkness, and the water, and of how little chance there is of escape, and so on, if one fell; and perhaps this is a bit owing to one or two narrow escapes I've had, and them making me a bit nervous. Soon as I get right to work I forget all the fidgeting, but the first starting is certainly rather nervous work for me, though I don't believe as I ever told any one of it before.

Digitized by Google

"That well down at Rowborough used to be like a nightmare to me, and laid heavier upon me than any well ever did before; but I kept on to my work like the rest, and we gradually went on lower and lower, step after step, month after month, always expecting to strike a main-spring, but never succeeding. Now it was loamy earth, then yellow clay, then gravel, then blue clay, then more gravel, then sand for far enough, then flinty soil, and then chalk, and so on month after month; but never any water worth speaking about. Of course we struck water times enough, and it bothered us a good deal to stop it out, but it was only from little upper springs, while what we wanted was the deep spring from far below—one that, when we tapped it, should come up strongly and give a good supply of water for the deep well.

"We were years digging that well—years; for money being in plenty, and them wanting a good supply of water, our orders were to keep on, and we did dig—down, down a good six hundred feet; and, mind you, the farther you get from the surface the slower the work gets on, on account of the time taken in sending the stuff up. Now, when I talk of six hundred feet, you mustn't suppose I mean a bored well, quite a little hole, perhaps six inches across, but one dug all the way, and a good nine foot in diameter.

"That was a fine well—*is* a fine well, I may say—with one of the best supplies of clear soft water in this country, and that too in a place where good water is terribly scarce. Our firm had the job; and I was one of the men put on at the beginning, and I was on it till it was finished.

"We did not go straight down all the way, but when

Digitized by Google

we got down to the chalk made a sort of chamber, and cut out sideways for a bit, and then began digging down again another shaft, this making it more convenient for the drawing up of the rubbish dug out; every scrap of which had, of course, to be taken to the surface.

"You perhaps hardly think of what it is being lowered down five hundred feet in a bucket, and then working by the light of a lantern in the bottom of the pit, whose walls you have to take care shall be carefully bricked up as you go on down, for fear they should fall in upon you. It is that hot you can hardly bear it, for very little fresh air comes down there; while, if it was not for smothering the thoughts, one might always be in dread of an accident. Now here, instead of feeling afraid of an incoming of the water, what we were most afraid of was that we should never get any water at all; and after all the labour bestowed on the place, it seemed quite disheartening to strike upon nothing but beggarly little rills worth nothing. But our governor was a George Stephenson sort of a man, and he had taken it into his head that we must get to water sooner or later, and he used to say that when we did strike it there would be plenty. So we dug on, slowly and surely, day after day, month after month, till some of the men got scared of the job on account of the depth, and left it. We had had no accidents, though, for everything had been worked out carefully and quietly, and though this was an underground place, every part was finished as carefully and truly as if it had been in full light of the sun.

"Last of all, we'd got down a good six hundred feet, while, according to appearances, it seemed that we might go on a good six hundred more before we got to

Digitized by Google

water; while in my case it seemed to be now part of my regular life to go down there, day after day, to work my spell, and I used to dig and lay bricks, dig and lay bricks, without thinking about water, or when it was coming, though the governor used to warn us to be careful in case when it did come it should come very fast.

"We did most part of our work by buckets and windlass; but, all the same, we had stagings and ladders down to the bottom, ever so many feet; and one day when I was down with a mate—only us two right at the bottom, though, of course, there were others at the stages and top—I was digging away and filling the bucket, giving the signal and sending it up, when I got looking at the course of bricks my mate was laying, and, as you will see, bricklayers in wells lay their bricks one under the other, and not one on the top of another like they would in building a house.

"All at once he says to me, 'Just shovel this gravel away again; there ain't room to get a brick under.'

"'There was plenty of room just now,' I says, 'for I took notice. The bricks give a little from up above.'

"Well, he thought so too, and went on with his work, while I went on with mine, picking and shovelling up the loose gravel and putting it in the bucket; but, though I worked pretty hard, I seemed to make no way; and, instead of him being able to go on and lay another course of bricks, he had to take a shovel and help me.

"'It's rum, ain't it?' he says, after we'd been digging hard for about an hour. 'Something's wrong; or else the place is bewitched. Here we haven't sunk an inch this last hour, I'll swear, though we've sent up

Digitized by Google

no end of bucketfuls. There's the last course of bricks just where it was, and I'm blest if I don't think it's sunk a bit in!'

"'Well, it does look like it,' I said, 'certainly; and I 'spose the brickwork's giving a bit from the tremendous weight up above. You've been working too hard, Tom,' I says, laughing, 'and your work hasn't had time to set.'

"'Well, I've only kept up with you,' he says, quite serious; 'but I 'spose it's as you say, and we'll take it a bit easier, for this is labour in vain.'

"It really looked so, for after another hour we seemed to be just where we were before, and I began almost to think it very likely something really was wrong, but what I couldn't tell. This was something new to me, for I had never been in so deep a well before, and I felt puzzled. It seemed no use to dig, for we got no lower; and once I really thought that instead of our getting any deeper, we were making the well shallower; but the next moment I laughed at this stupid thought, and filled and started the bucket, when, dinner-time being come, we laid down our tools, and made our way up to daylight; but before I started, I could not help feeling more puzzled than ever, for now, on one side, there was the bottom course of bricks quite below the loose gravel and sand.

"I didn't say anything to my mate, and, truth to tell, I forgot all about it the next moment, for I was thinking of dinner; and I didn't recollect it again until after two, when we were nearly at the bottom, when it came back with a flash, and I then seemed to see the cause of it all.

"I was at the bottom, and Tom above me, and

Digitized by Google

we were just below the last staging, when I heard a strange roaring, rumbling noise that turned my very blood cold; for it seemed to me then, as I stood on the rounds of that bottom ladder, that a wild beast was breaking loose, and about to tear at me and drag me off the rungs, and for a few seconds I couldn't speak or move, till Tom sings out:

"'Hallo! what's up?' and that seemed to give me breath.

"'Up, up!' I shouted; 'the water!' and he started climbing again as hard as he could, and me panting and snorting after him, for, with a tremendous bubbling, roaring rush, the water, that had been forcing the earth slowly upwards for hours past, had now pushed its way through, and as we reached the second stage, we heard the one below us regularly burst up, and saw the ladder we had just left sink down.

"Heard in that hollow, echoing well, hundreds of feet from the surface, and under such circumstances, the roar of the water was something awful to listen to. We could not see it, but it was coming up seething and bubbling like a fountain, while the pressure beneath must have been something fearful.

"As we got higher our progress was slower, for the men on the upper stages were before us; and though they had taken the alarm from our shouts and the bellowing of the water, they did not travel so fast as we did. Stage after stage was forced up, and ladder after ladder sunk down as we got higher, and never did I feel such a relief as when we stood in the chamber cut out of the chalk, where we could look up and see the little ring of daylight far above us; and then, half a dozen men as we were, we clung to the bucket and

Digitized by Google

rope, and gave the signal for them to wind up, the water leaping round our feet as we slowly rose.

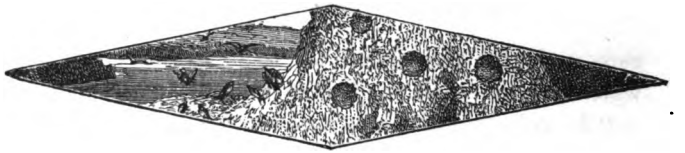
"As it happened it was a new and a strong rope, or it must have given way with the tremendous strain put upon it, and I shivered again and again as we swung backwards and forwards, while my only wonder now is that some of us did not fall back from sheer fright.

"But we reached the surface safely, with the water bubbling and running after us nearly the whole way, for it rose to within fifty feet of the top, and has stayed at that height ever since; but though one man fainted, and we all looked white and scared, no one was hurt. Ah! it was the narrowest escape I ever had.

"Our tools we lost, of course, but a great deal of the woodwork and many of the short ladders floated up, and were brought out. It would take a good deal to make me forget the well that grew shallower the more we shovelled out the gravel. For a supply of water no town can be better off than Rowborough; and then, look at the depth—six hundred feet!"

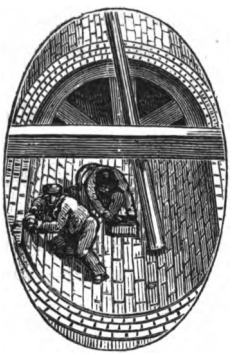
Poor old Goodsell had a hard time of it, and suffered great pain before I got his shoulder well, and even then he never was able to carry on his occupation as of old. For it was a terrible accident, the rope breaking, and a bucket used in drawing up the earth from a well falling upon his shoulder; and, as he said, a couple of inches more to the left, and he would have been killed.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER IV.

MY UNDERGROUND PATIENT.



I HAD a very singular case, one day, being called in to attend, in a busy part of London, upon a curious-looking man who lay in bed suffering from the effects of bad gas. He was a peculiar-looking fellow, with grizzled black hair, excessively sallow skin, piercing eyes, and his face was as strangely and terribly seamed with the small-pox.

I had some little trouble with his case, which was the result of his having been prisoned for some hours in one of the sewers that run like arteries under London. A sudden flood had come on, and he had been compelled with a companion to retreat to a higher level, where the foul air had accumulated, and he had had a narrow escape for his life.

As he amended I used to chat with him about his avocation, and I was much struck by the coolness with which he used to talk about his work, and incidentally I learned whence came the seaming in his face.

"You see, sir," he said, "the danger's nothing if a

Digitized by Google

man has what you call presence of mind—has his wits about him, you know. For instance, say he's in danger, or what not, and he steps out with his right foot, and he steps out of danger; but say he steps out with his left foot, and he loses his life. Sounds but very little, that does; but it makes two steps difference between the right way and the wrong way, and that's enough to settle it all; sound or cripple, home or hospital, fireside or a hole in the churchyard. Presence of mind's everything to a working man, and it's a pity they can't teach a little more of it in schools to the boys. I don't want to boast, for I'm very thankful; but a little bit of quiet thought has saved my life more than once, when poor fellows, mates of mine, have been in better places and lost theirs.

"I'm a queer sort of fellow, always having been fond of moling and working underground from a boy. Why, when I went to school, nothing pleased me better than setting up what we called a robbers' cave in the old hill, where they dug the bright red sand; and there, of a Wednesday afternoon, we'd go and climb up the side to the steep pitch where it was all honeycombed by the sand-martins, and then, just like them, we'd go on burrowing and digging in at the side, scooping away in the beautiful clean sand, till I should think one summer we had dug in twenty feet. Grand place that was, so we thought, and fine and proud we used to be; and the only wonder is that the unsupported roof did not come down and bury some half-dozen of us. Small sets-out of that sort of course we did have, parts of the side falling down; but as long as it did not bury our heads we rather enjoyed it, and laughed at one another.

Digitized by Google

Well, my old love for underground work seemed to cling to me when I grew up, and that's how it is I've always been employed so much upon sewers. They're nasty places, to say the best of them; but, then, as they're made for the health of a town, and it's somebody's duty to work down in them, why, one does it in a regular sort of way, and forgets all the nastiness.

"Now, just shut your eyes for a few minutes and fancy you're close at my elbow, and I'll try if I can't take you down with me into a sewer, and you shall have the nice little adventure over again that happened to me—nothing to signify, you know, only a trifling affair; but rather startling to a man all the same. The sewerage is altered now a good deal, and the great main stream goes far down the river, but I'm talking about the time when all the sewers emptied themselves straight into the Thames.

"Now, we've got an opening here in the street on account of a stoppage, and we've gone down ladder after ladder, and from stage to stage, until we are at the bottom, where the brick arch has been cut away, and now I'm calling it all up again, as you shall hear.

"I don't think I ever knew what fear was in those days—I mean fear in my work, for, being the way in which I got my daily bread, danger seemed nothing, and I went anywhere, as I did on the night I am speaking of. It was a very large sewer, and through not having any clock at home, I'd come out a good hour before my time. I stopped talking to the men I was to relieve for some little time, waiting for my mates to come—the job being kept on with, night and day. Last of all, I lit a bit of candle in one of the lanterns, and, taking it,

Digitized by Google

stepped down into the water, which came nearly to the tops of my boots, and began wading up stream.

"Now, when I say up to the tops of my boots, I mean high navigator's boots that covered the thigh; and so I went wading along, holding my lantern above my head, and taking a good look at the brickwork, to see if I could find any sore places—it being of course of great consequence that all should be sound and strong.

"Strange wild places those are when you are not busy! Dark as pitch, and with every plash in the water echoing along quite loud when by you, and then whispering off in a curious creepy way, as if curious creatures in the far-off dark were talking about it, and wondering at you for going down there. Over your head the black, damp brickwork; both sides of you, wet, slimy brickwork; and under your feet slippery brickwork, covered inches deep with a soft yielding mud that gives way under your feet, and makes walking hard work. In some places the mud is swept nearly clean away, and then you go splashing along, while always in a curious, echoing, musical way, comes the sound of running water, dripping water, plashing water, seeming always to be playing one melancholy strange tune, sad and sweet, and peculiar. Busy at work, one don't notice it, but when looking about, as I was, it all seemed to strike me in a way I can't explain.

"Slowly on through the running water, holding my lantern up, and always looking at the same sight—a little spot of brickwork shining in the light of my bit of candle, and all beyond that black darkness. The light shone, too, a little off the top of the water in a

Digitized by Google

queer glimmering way, as at every step I took there were little waves sent on before me to go beating and leaping up against the sides. But every now and then I could hear a little splash, and see the water on the move in a strange way in front, presenting just the same appearance as if some one was drawing a stick through it, and leaving a widening trail behind.

"I said 'in a strange way,' but it wasn't a strange way to me, for I knew it well enough, and had seen it so often that I took hardly any notice of it. If I had had a strong light I should have seen a little dark shape leap from the opening of a drain into the water, and then disappear for a few moments, to come up again, and swim along quite fast; but with such a light as I had I could only see the disturbed water.

"Rats were old friends of mine, and did not trouble me in the least, as I went on, now turning to the right and now to the left, sometimes going back a little, and then pushing on again, till all at once, without a moment's warning, out went my bit of candle, and I was in complete darkness.

"Well, I growled a good deal at that—not that I minded the dark, but it put a stop to the bit of overlooking I was upon; and though in most cases I had a bit or two of extra candle, it so happened that this time I hadn't a scrap, and all I had to do was to get back.

"I suppose I hadn't gone a dozen yards before I stopped short, with the cold sweat standing all over my face, and my breath coming thick and short, for, instead of the low musical, whispering tinkle of the water, there was a rushing noise I well knew coming along a large sewer to the left, and for want of the bit of presence of mind that I ought to have had then, instead

Digitized by Google

of rushing up stream past the mouth of the opening, I must run down; and then came a curious wild, confused state of mind that I can always call back now when I like to go into the dark for a few minutes—when I was being borne along by a furious rush of water that seemed to fill the sewer, washing me before it now up and now down, like a cork in a stream.

"As a matter of course, I must try to do everything to make matters worse, and keep on fighting against a power that would have borne fifty men before it. But that was an awful minute—I call it a minute, though I dare say the struggle only lasted a few moments—when I seemed dashed against a corner, and there I was fighting my way with the stream carrying me swiftly along, but seeming weaker every moment; and at last I was standing, with my hands thrust into a side drain to keep me steady, while I coughed and panted, and tried to get my breath once more, feeling all the while dizzy and confused, and unable to make out where I was.

"The rush of water was now past, and the sewer two feet above its regular level; but, stunned as I had been, I could not get into my regular way of thinking, nor collect myself as to what I ought to do next; and it is no light thing to be fifty foot under ground in a dark tunnel with the water rushing furiously by, and you not able to think.

"When I say able to think, I mean not regularly, for I could think too much, and that too about things that I did not want to think about, for they troubled me. What I ought to have thought of then was the keeping of myself cool and trying to get out, but I couldn't move, for I fancied that if I did I must be

Digitized by Google

swept away again. Now, I had often been along the sewers when the water was deeper than it now was and running swifter, but for all that I was afraid to move.

"How I magnified the danger, and made out no end of fanciful images in the darkness, all of them seeming to point to my end, and telling me that I should never get out alive! Then I got calling up all the accidents and horrors of that great place where I was. First I recollected how two poor fellows came down not very far from where I stood—half a mile perhaps—and were working in one of the small drains that was half stopped with soil and rubbish; they were down on one knee, in a bent position, and shovelling the mud back from one to another underneath them, and working towards a man-hole, when a rush of water came, and they struggled on against it till a mate at the man-hole, who stood there with a lantern and shouted, just got hold of the first man's hand, when there came a sharper rush than ever from above, and the poor fellow was gone. I was one of those who hunted for them the next day, now in one branch and then in another, going up culverts and drains of all sizes, where I thought it possible they could have been swept, for there had been a watch kept at the mouths, and hurdles put down to stop anything from being washed out. A whole week I was on that job before I found both, the last being in a narrow place, where the poor fellows must have crawled.

"Nice thing that was to think of at such a time! But it would come, and I seemed to have no power to stop it. Then I recollected about the mate of mine who lost his life in the foul air which collects sometimes in places where there isn't a free current; and

Digitized by Google

then, too, about the rat case, where the man who came up off the river-shore got amongst the rats, or else fell down in a fit, and the way he came out was in a basket, for there was nothing left but his bones.

"Ah! nice things these were for a man to get thinking of, shivering as I was there in the dark! But I didn't shiver long, for I came all over hot and feverish, and I should have yelled for help but I was afraid, for the idea had come upon me that if I made the slightest noise I should have the rats about me; and although it was pitch dark, I seemed to see them waiting in droves, clustering like bees all over the sides of the sewer, clinging to the top and swimming across and across the surface of the water. There they all were plain enough, with their bright black eyes and sharp noses, while I kept on fancying how keen their teeth must be. We always supposed that they would attack a man in the dark, but as we never went unprovided with lights there was never any case known among us of a fight with them. But now, in the dark as I was, I quite made up my mind that they were waiting till I made a movement, and that then they would be swarming over me in all directions; and I shuddered, and my blood ran cold, as I thought of what would follow.

"Every drip—every little hollow splash, or ripple against the side seemed to me to be made by rats; the beating of my heart against my ribs with its heavy throb seemed to be the hurrying by of the little patting animals, and at times I fancied that I could hear their eager panting as they were scuffling by, hunting for me. Rats everywhere, as it seemed to me; and again and again I was feeling myself all over to see if any

Digitized by Google

were clinging to me or climbing up, for the motion of the water as it swept on seemed for all the world like the little wretches brushing against my side.

"I don't believe now that there was a rat near me all the time, for it was all pure imagination. Still the imagination was so strong that it was worse than reality, and even in what came afterwards I don't think I suffered more. It seems to be that one's nerves at such a time get worked up to a dreadful pitch, and everything one thinks of seems to come strongly before one, so that if the horror was strung up much tighter, nature could not bear it.

"I could bear no more then as I stood there; and knowing all the while—or feeling all the while—that to move was to bring the rats upon me, I started off, bewildered so that I had no idea where I was, only feeling that I must go with the stream to get out of the sewer, whichever branch I was in. So I tore on with the water up to my middle, but getting deeper and deeper every minute as I ran my hand along the wall, now turning to the left, now to the right, and shuddering every moment as I fancied I felt a rat touch me. But I had been walking and wading along for a good half-hour before I felt one, and then just as I fancied I saw a gleam of light peer out of the darkness right in front, something ran hastily up my breast and shoulder, and then leaped off with a splash into the water.

"If I had not grasped at the slippery side of the sewer and supported myself, I must have gone down; and to have sunk down in four feet of water was certain death, in the state I then was in; but I kept up, and giving a shout, half-shriek, half-yell, I dashed on towards where I fancied I had seen the light.

Digitized by Google

"Fancied, indeed, for it seemed to grow darker as I went on, and I grew more and more confused every moment. If I could only have known where I was for a single instant, that would have been sufficient, even to knowing only what particular branch I was in; but I was too confused to try and make out any of the marks that might have told me.

"There it was again—a scratching of tiny claws and a hurried rush up my breast, over my shoulder, something wet and cold brushing my face, then the half-leap, half-start I gave, and the sharp splash in the water as the beast leaped off me. And then it came quicker and faster—two and three—six—a dozen upon me, and as I tore them off they bit me savagely, making their little teeth meet in my hands, and hanging there; while more than one vicious bite in the face made me yell out with pain.

"The horrible fear seemed now to have gone, strange as it may appear to say so. I was mad with rage now, and fought desperately for my life, as the rats swarmed round and attacked me furiously, without giving me a moment's rest. I had a large knife, which I managed to get open and strike with, but it was more than useless, for my enemies were so small and active and constant in their attacks that I could not get a fair blow at them, and dashing away the blade I was glad enough to fight them with their own weapons, and bit and tore at them, seizing them one after another in my hands, and either crushing or dashing them up against the sides of the sewer.

"But it seemed toil in vain, for as I dashed one off half a dozen swarmed up me, over my arms and back, covering my chest, fastening on to the bare parts of

Digitized by Google

my neck, and making my face run down with blood.

"'Can't last much longer!' I remember thinking; but I felt that I must fight on to the last, and I kept on tearing the squeaking vermin off, and crushing them in my hands, often so that they had no chance of biting; but there must have been hundreds swarming round me, waiting until others were beaten off to make a lodgment. Now I was dashing up stream as hard as I could, in the hope that I could shake them off; and as I waded splashing along I tore those off that were upon me, but they hunted me as dogs would a hare; and though it was dense black darkness there, so that I groped my way along with outstretched hands, it seemed to me that the little beasts could see well enough, and kept dashing up me as fast as I could beat them off.

"Splashing along as I was, I had a better chance of keeping the vermin off; but then I could not keep it up. I must have been struggling about for hours now, and was worn out, for even at the best of times it is terribly hard work walking in water; and now that I was drenched with it, and had my great thigh boots full, the toil was fearful, and I felt that I must give in.

"'I wouldn't mind so much,' I thought, 'if I could find a dry spot where I could lie down;' but the idea of this double death was dreadful, and spurred me on again to new efforts, so that I kept on rushing forward by spurts, my breath coming in groans and sobs, while I kept the vermin off my face as well as I could.

"'It's all over!' I groaned at last, sinking on my knees close to the side of the sewer, and nearly going

Digitized by Google

under, as my legs slipped in the ooze at the bottom. But I stopped that by trying to force my nails in one of the cracks between the slimy bricks, and as the rats came at me there was only my head and neck up above the filthy water; while I gave a long shriek that drove them back for a moment. And now it seemed to me that I could see the little wretches coming at me, and, yes—no—yes, I could see a faint gleam on the top of the water, and then it was brighter, and I heard a shout which I believe I answered, though I can recollect no more.

"Well, they ain't such very deep marks, sir—only just through the skin, you know; but they spoil a man's beauty, which they say is just skin-deep. Lots of people have thought as I've had the smallpox very bad, and I let them, for this here as you've heard the whole story about is one of the things as I don't like to bring up very often. I always feel as if I'd been very close to the end and had been dragged back, which makes me feel solemn, and I always back out when any mate tries to draw the story out of me, for they're uncommon fond of hearing it over and over again. Joe Stock—that's one of them—he could tell you the part as I can't about how they hunted for me and shouted till they were tired—going miles, you know, for it would surprise you to thoroughly know what there is under the streets of London.

"'Harry,' he's said to me before now, 'I never see such a sight in my life, and when I saw you get up off your knees, mate, and come a reeling towards me, I'm blest if I didn't think it was somethin' no canny, and I nearly dropped my lantern and ran for it. There was your face all streaming down with blood, and your hands

Digitized by Google

the same, and as to the noise you was making—ugh!' he'd say, 'it was awful bad."

"And now, just one word of advice, sir—don't you never go down no sewers without two or three bits of candle in your pocket—high up in the breast of your jacket, you know—and plenty of lucifers in a water-tight tin-box, or perhaps you may get in such a mess as I did."

Very good advice, no doubt; but after seeing the place where three men went down to work some short time since, listening to the hollow musical drip of the water, and the strange whisperings of the long tunnels; after listening to the history of the hard fight against a sudden rush of water told me by the sturdy toiler, who shuddered and turned pale as he recalled the desperate fight for life, and then, in lowered tones, narrated how he had found his poor mate's body washed into a narrow culvert, I felt quite satisfied, and I don't think I shall ever make any explorations in a sewer.

In fact, I never see a grating open, or meet one of the sturdy fellows in his blue Jersey shirt and high boots without thinking of my patient, and the risks such people run to earn their daily bread.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

MY BLACK PATIENT.

THERE'S a very terrible disease upon which a great deal has been written, but not a great deal done. In fact, it is difficult to deal with special diseases brought on by the toiler's work. It is a vexed question what to do or how to treat the consumption that attacks the needle-grinders and other dry grinders; the horrible sufferings of those who inhale the dust of deadly minerals; the bone disease of the workers in phosphorus and many other ills brought on by working at particular trades.

The disease I allude to in particular is one that attacks that familiar personage, the chimney sweep, and I have often had to treat some poor fellow or another for it.

There was one man who stands in my note book as J. J.—John Johnson, I had under my care several

Digitized by Google

times, and we came to be very good friends, for under that sooty skin of his—I never saw it once really clean—there was a great deal of true humanity and tenderness of heart, as I soon found from the way in which he behaved to his wife.

"Why don't you chimney sweeps—Ramoneurs as you call yourselves now—invent a better cry than svi-thee-up?"

"Ramoneur," he said with a husky chuckle. "Yes, that's it, doctor. Fine, aint it? I allus calls myself a plain sweep, though. That's good enough for me."

"But you might do without that yell of yours," I said. "London cries are a terrible nuisance, though I don't know that I'd care to have them done away with. Your *svi-thee-up* don't sound much like sweep."

"*Svi-thee-up, svi-thee-up,*" he cried, as he lay there in bed, to the utter astonishment of his wife. "Don't sound much like sweep? No, it don't; but then one has to have one's own regular cry, as folks may know us by. Why, listen to any of them of a morning about the street, and who'd think it was creases as this one was a hollering, or Yarmouth bloaters that one; or that 'Yow-hoo!' meant new milk? It ain't what we say—it's the sound of our voices. Don't the servant gals as hears us of a morning know what it means well enough when the bell rings, and them sleepy abed? Oh, no, not at all! But there's no mussy for 'em, and we jangles away at the bell, and hollers a good 'un till they lets us in; for, you see, it comes nat'ral when you're obliged to be up yourself, and out in the cold, to not like other folks to be snugging it in bed.

"But, then, it's one's work, you know, and I dunno

Digitized by Google

whether it was that or the sutt as give me this here coarse voice, which nothing clears now—most likely it was the sutt. How times are altered, though, since I was a boy! That there climbing boy Act o' Parliament made a reg'lar revolution in our business, and now here we goes with this here bundle o' canes, with a round brush at the end, like a great, long screw fishing-rod, you know, all in jints, and made o' the best Malacky cane, so as to go into all the ins and outs, and bend about anywhere, till it's right above the pot, and bending and swinging down. But they're poor things, bless you, and don't sweep a chimbley half like a boy used. You never heers the rattle of a brush at the top of a chimbley-pot now, and the boy giving his 'hillo—hallo—hullo—o—o—o!' to show as he'd not been shamming and skulking half way up the floo. Why, that was one of the cheery sounds as you used to hear early in the mornin', when you was tucked up warm in bed; for there was always somebody's chimbley a being swept.

"Puts me in mind again of when I was a little bit of a fellow, and at home with mother, as I can recollect with her nice pleasant face, and a widder's cap round it. Hard pushed, poor thing, when she took me to Joe Barkby, the chimbley sweep, as said he'd teach me the trade if she liked. And there was I, shivering along aside her one morning, when she was obliged to take me to Joe, and we got there to find him sitting over his brexfass, and he arst mother to have some; but her heart was too full, poor thing, and she wouldn't, and was going away, and Joe sent me to the door to let her out; and that's one of the things as I shall never forget—no, not if I lives to a hundred—my mother's poor,

Digitized by Google

sad, weary face, and the longing look she give me when we'd said 'Good bye,' and I was going to shut the door after her. Such a sad, longing look, as if she could have caught me up and run off with me. I saw it as she stood on the step, and me with the door in my hand—that there green door, with a bright brass knocker, and brass plate with 'Barkby, Chimbley Sweep,' on it. There was tears in her eyes, too; and I felt so miserable myself I didn't know what to do as I stood watching her, and she came and give me one more kiss, saying, 'God bless you!' and then I shut the door a little more, and a little more, till I could see the same sad look through quite a little crack; and then it was close shut, and I was wiping my eyes with my knuckles.

"Ah! I've often thought since as I shut that door a deal too soon; but I was too young to know all as that poor thing must have suffered.

"Barkby warn't a bad sort; but then, what can you expect from a sweep? He didn't behave so very bad to us little chummies; but there it was—up at four, and tramp through the cold, dark streets, hot or cold, wet or dry; and then stand shivering till you could wake up the servants—an hour, perhaps, sometimes. Then in you went to the cold, miserable house, with the carpets all up, or p'r'aps you had to wait no one knows how long while the gal was yawning, and knick-knick-knicking with a flint and steel over a tinder-box, and then blowing the spark till you could get a brimstone match alight. Then there was the forks to get for us to stick the black cloth in front of the fireplace, and then there was one's brush, and the black cap to pull down over one's face, pass under the cloth,

Digitized by Google

CHIMNEY SWEEPS BEFORE THE CLIMBING BOYS' ACT OF PARLIAMENT.

Digitized by Google

and begin swarming up the chimbley all in the dark.

"It was very trying to a little bit of a chap of ten years old, you know—quite fresh to the job; and though Barkby give me lots of encouragement, without being too chuff, it seemed awful as soon as I got hold of the bars, which was quite warm then, and began feeling my way, hot, and smothery, and sneezy, in my cap, till I give my head such a pelt against some of the brick-work that I began to cry; for, though I'd done plenty of low ones this was the first high chimbley as I'd been put to. But I chokes it down, as I stood there with my little bare toes all amongst the cinders, and then began to climb.

"Every now and then Barkby shoves his head under the cloth, and 'Go ahead, boy,' he'd say; and I kep' on going ahead as fast as I could, for I was afeared on him, though he never spoke very gruff to me; but I had heard him go on and cuss awful, and I didn't want to put him out. So there was I, poor little chap—I'm sorry for myself even now, you know—swarming up a little bit at a time, crying away quietly, and rubbing the skin off my poor knees and elbows, while the place felt that hot and stuffy I could hardly breathe, cramped up as I was.

"Now, you wouldn't think as any one could see in the dark, with his eyes close shut, and a thick cap over his face, pulled right down to keep the sutt from getting up his nose—you wouldn't think anyone could see anything there; but I could, quite plain; and what do you think it was? Why, my mother's face, looking at me so sad, and sweet, and smiling, through her tears, that it made me give quite a chok-

Digitized by Google

ing sob every now and then and climb away as hard as ever I could, though my toes and knees seemed to have the skin quite off, and smarted ever so; while I kep' on slipping a bit every now and then, for I was new at climbing, and this was a long chimbley, from the housekeeper's room of a great house, right from under ground, to the top.

"Sometimes I'd stop and have a cry, for I'd feel beat out, and the face as had cheered me on was gone; but then I'd hear Barkby's choky voice come muttering up the floo, same as I've shouted to lots o' boys in my time, 'Go ahead, boy!' and I'd go ahead again, though at last I was sobbing and choking as hard as I could, for I kep' on thinking as I should never get to the top, and be stuck there always in the chimbley, never to come out no more.

"I won't be a sweep, I won't be a sweep," I says, sobbing and crying; and all the time making up my mind as I'd run away first chance, and go home again; and then, after a good long struggle, I was in the pot, with my head out, then my arms out, and the cap off for the cool wind to blow in my face.

"And, ah! how cool and pleasant that first puff of wind was, and how the fear and horror seemed to go away as I climbed out, and stood looking about me; till all at once I started, for there came up out of the pot, buzzing like, Barkby's voice, as he calls out, 'Go ahead, boy!'

So then I set to rattling away with my brush-handle to show as I was out, and then climbs down on to the roof, and begins looking about me. It was just getting daylight, so that I could see my way about, and all seemed so fresh and strange that, with my brush in my

Digitized by Google

hand, I begins to wander over the roofs, climbing up the slates and sliding down t'other side, which was good fun, and worth doing two or three times over. Then I got to a parapet, and leaned looking over into the street, and thinking of what a way it would be to tumble; but so far off being afraid, I got on to the stone coping, and walked along ever so far, till I came to an attic window, where I could peep in and see a man lying asleep, with his mouth half open; then I climbed up another slope, and had another slide down; and then another, and another, till I forgot all about my sore knees; and at last sat astride of the highest part, looking about me at the view I had of the tops of houses as far as I could see, for it was getting quite light now.

"All at once I turned all of a horrible fright, for I recklected about Barkby, and felt almost as if he'd got hold of me, and was thrashing me for being so long. I ran to the first chimbley stack, but that wasn't right, for I knew as the one I came up was a-top of a slate-sloping roof. Then I ran to another, thinking I should know the one I came out of by the sutt upon it. But they'd all got sutt upon 'em—every chimbley-pot I looked at, and so I hunted about from one to another till I got all in a muddle, and didn't know where I was nor which pot I'd got out of. Last of all, shaking and trembling, I makes sure as I'd got the right one, and climbing up I managed, after nearly tumbling off, to get my legs in, when pulling down my cap, I let myself through a bit at a time, and leaving go I slipped with a regular rush, nobody knows how far, till I came to a bend in the chimbley, where I stopped short—scraped, and bruised, and trembling, while I felt that confused I couldn't move.

Digitized by Google

"After a bit I came round a little, and, whimpering and crying to myself, I began to feel my way about a bit with my toes, and then got along a little away straight like, when the chimbley took another bend down, and stiffly and slowly I let myself down a little and a little till my feet touched cold iron, and I could get no farther. But after thinking a bit, I made out where I was, and that I was standing on the register of a fire-place, so I begins to lift it up with my toes as well as I could, when crash it went down again, and there came such a squealing and screeching as made me begin climbing up again as fast as I could till I reached the bend, where I stopped and had another cry, I felt so miserable; and then I shrunk up and shivered, for there came a roar and a rattle that echoed up the chimbley, while the sutt came falling down in a way that nearly smothered me.

"Now, I knew enough to tell myself that the people being frightened had fired a gun up the chimbley, while the turn round as it took had saved me from being hurt. So I sat squatted up quite still, and then heard some one shout out 'Hallo!' two or three times, and then 'Puss, puss, puss!' Then I could hear voices whispering a bit, and then the register was banged down, as I supposed by the noise.

"Only fancy! sitting in a bend of the chimbley shivering with fear, and half smothered with heat and sutt, while your breath comes heavy and thick from the cap over your face! Not nice, it ain't; and more than once I've felt a bit sorry for the poor boys as I've sent up chimbleys in my time. But there I was, and I soon began scrambling up again, and worked hard,

Digitized by Google

for the chimbley was wider than the other one. Last of all I got up to the pot, and out on to the stack, and then again I had a good cry.

"Now, when I'd rubbed my eyes again, I had another look round, and felt as if I was at the wrong pot, so I scrambled down, slipped over the slates, and got to a stack in front, when I felt sure I was right, for there were black finger-marks on the red pot; so I got up, slipped my legs in, and taking care this time that I didn't fall, began to lower myself down slowly, though I was all of a twitter to know what Barkby would do to me for being so long. Now I'd slip a little bit, being so sore and rubbed I could hardly stop myself; and then I'd manage to let myself down gently; but all at once the chimbley seemed to open so wide, being an old one I suppose, that I couldn't reach very well with my back and elbows pressed out; so, feeling myself slipping again, I tried to stick my nails in the bricks, at the same time drawing my knees 'most up to my chin, when down I went perhaps a dozen feet, and then, where there was a bit of a curve, I stuck reg'lar wedged in all of a heap, nose and chin altogether, knees up against the bricks on one side, and my back against the other, and me not able to move.

"For a bit I was so frightened that I never tried to stir, but last of all the horrid fix I was in came upon me like a clap, and there I was, half choked, dripping with prespiration, and shuddering in every limb, wedged in where all was dark as Egypt.

"After a bit I managed to drag off my cap, thinking that I could then see the daylight through the pot. But no; the chimbley curved about too much, and all was dark as ever; while what puzzled me was, that

Digitized by Google

I couldn't breathe any easier now the cap was off, for it seemed hot, and close, and stuffy, though I thought that was through me being so frightened, for I never fancied now but I was in the right chimbley, and wondered that Barkby didn't shout.

All at once there came a terrible fear all over me—a feeling that I've never forgotten, nor never shall as long as I'm a sweep. It was as if all the blood in my body had run out and left me weak, and helpless, and faint, for down below I could hear a heavy beat-beat-beat noise, that I knew well enough, and up under me came a rush of hot smoke that nearly suffocated me right off; when I gave such a horrid shriek of fear as I've never forgot neither, for the sound of it frightened me worse.

It didn't sound like my voice at all, as I kept on shrieking, and groaning, and crying for help, too frightened to move, though I've often thought since as a little twisting on my part would have set me loose, to try and climb up again. But, bless you, no; I could do nothing but shout and cry, with the noise I made sounding hollow and stifly, and the heat and smoke coming up so as to nearly choke me over and over again.

"I knew fast enough now that I had come down a chimbley where there had been a clear fire, and now some one had put lumps of coal on, and been breaking them up; and in the fright I was in I could do nothing else but shout away till my voice got weak and wiry, and I coughed and wheezed for breath.

But I hadn't been crying for nothing, though; for soon I heard some one shout up the chimbley, and then came a deal of poking and noise, and the smoke and heat came curling up by me worse than ever, so

Digitized by Google

that I thought it was all over with me, but at the same time came a whole lot of hot, bad smelling steam; and then some one knocked at the bricks close by my head, and I heard a buzzing sound, when I gave a hoarse sort of cry, and then felt stupid and half asleep.

"By-and-by there was a terrible knocking and hammering close beside me, getting louder and louder every moment; and yet it didn't seem to matter to me, for I hardly knew what was going on, though the voices came nearer and the noise plainer, and at last I've a bit of recollection of hearing some one say 'Fetch brandy,' and I wondered whether they meant Barkby, while I could feel the fresh air coming upon me. Then I seemed to waken up a bit, and see the daylight through a big hole, where there was ever so much rough broken bricks and mortar between me and the light; and next thing I recollect is lying upon a mattress, with a fine gentleman leaning over me, and holding my hand in his.

"'Don't,' I says in a whisper; 'It's all sutty.' Then I see him smile, and he asked me how I was.

"'Oh, there ain't no bones broke,' I says; 'only Barkby 'll half kill me.'

"'What for?' says another gentleman.

"'Why, coming down the wrong chimbley,' I says; and then, warming up a bit with my wrongs, 'But 'twarn't my fault,' I says. 'Who could tell t'other from which, when there warn't no numbers nor nothink on 'em, and they was all alike, so as you didn't know which to come down, and him a swearing acause you was so long? Where is he?' I says in a whisper.

"One looked at t'other, and there was six or seven people about me; for I was lying on the mattress put

Digitized by Google

on the floor close aside a great hole in the wall, and a heap o' bricks and mortar.

"'Who?' says the first gent, who was a doctor.

"'Why, Barkby,' I says; 'my guv'nor, who sent me up number seven's chimbley.'

"'Oh, he's not here,' says someone. 'This ain't number seven; this is number ten. Send to seven,' he says.

"Then they began talking a bit, and I heard something said about 'poor boy,' and 'fearful groans,' and 'horrid position;' and they thought I didn't hear 'em, for I'd got my eyes shut, meaning to sham Abram when Barkby came, for fear he should hurt me; but I needn't have shammed, for I couldn't neither stand nor sit up for a week arter; and I believe arter all, it's that has had something to do with me being so husky-voiced.

"Old Barkby never hit me a stroke, and I believe arter all he was sorry for me; but a sweep's is a queer life even now, though afore the act was passed some poor boys was used cruel, and more than one got stuck in a floo, to be pulled out dead."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

MY SHEFFIELD PATIENT.

PLENTY of you know Sheffield by name; but I think those who know it by nature are few and far between. If you tried to give me your impressions of the place, you would most likely begin to talk of a black, smoky town, full of forges, factories, and furnaces, with steam blasts hissing, and Nasmyth hammers thudding and thundering all day long. But there you would stop, although you were right as far as you went. Let me say a little more, speaking as one who knows the place, and tell you that it lies snugly embosomed in glorious hills, curving and sweeping between which are some of the loveliest vales in England. The town is in parts dingy enough, and there is more smoke than is pleasant; but don't imagine that all Sheffield's sons are toiling continually in a choking atmosphere. There is a class of men—a large class, and one that has attained to a not very enviable notoriety in Sheffield—I mean the grinders—whose task

Digitized by Google

is performed under far different circumstances; and when I describe one wheel, I am only painting one of hundreds clustering round the busy town, ready to sharpen and polish the blades for which Sheffield has long been famed.

Through every vale there flows a stream, fed by lesser rivulets, making their way down little valleys rich in wood and dell. Wherever such a streamlet runs trickling over the rocks, or bubbling amongst the stones, water rights have been established, hundreds of years old; busy hands have formed dams, and the pent-up water is used for turning some huge water-wheel, which in its turn sets in motion ten, twenty, or thirty stones in the long shed beside it, the whole being known in the district as "a wheel."

One of my favourite walks lay along by a tiny bubbling brook, overhung with trees, up past wheel after wheel, following the streamlet towards its head, higher up the gorge through which it ran—a vale where you might stand and fancy yourself miles from man and his busy doings, as you listened to the silvery tinkle of the water playing amidst the pebbles, the sweet twittering song of birds overhead, or the hum of bees busy amidst the catkins and the blossoms; watched the flashing of the bright water as the sun glistened and darted amidst the leaves, till on the breeze would come the "plash, plash," of the water-wheel, and the faintly-heard harsh "chir-r-r-r" of blade upon grindstone, when, recollecting that man was bound to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow, one would leave the beauties around, and hurry on to some visit.

I had a patient who used to work in one of those pleasant little vales—a patient to whom it fell to my

Digitized by Google

lot to render, next to life, almost one of the greatest services man can render to man.

He was genial and patient, handsome too, and I used to think what a fine manly looking fellow he must have been before he suffered from the dastardly outrage of which he was the victim.

He was very low spirited during the early part of his illness and he used to talk to me in a quiet patient way about the valley, and I was surprised to find how fond he was of nature and its beauties, some of the sentiments that came from his lips being far above what one would have expected from such a man.

My bill, I am sorry to say, was a very long one with him, but he laughed and said that he had been a long patient.

"Why Doctor," he said one evening many many months after his accident, and when he had quite recovered, and as he spoke he took his wife's hand, "I shouldn't have found fault if it had been twice as much. I only wish it was, and I had the money to pay you that or four times as much. But you haven't made a very handsome job of me: has he, Jenny?"

There were tears in his wife's eyes, though there was a smile upon her lip, and I knew that she was one who, as he told me, looked upon the heart.

"Ah, Doctor," he said to me as he went over the troublous past, "it was very pleasant there working where you had only to lift your eyes from the wet whirling stone and look out of the open shed window at the bright blue sky and sunshine. There was not much listening to the birds there amongst the hurrying din of the rushing stones, and the chafing of band, and shriek of steel blade being ground; but the toil

Digitized by Google

seemed pleasanter there, with nothing but the waving trees to stay the light of God's sunshine, and I used to feel free and happy, and able to drink in long draughts of bright, pure air, whenever I straightened myself from my task, and gathered strength for the next spell.

"I could have been very happy there on that wheel, old and ramshackle place as it was, if people would only have let me. I was making a pretty good wage, and putting by a little every week, for at that time it had come into my head that I should like to take to myself a wife. Now, I'd lived nine-and-twenty years without such a thing coming seriously to mind, but one Sunday, when having a stroll out on the Glossop Road with John Ross—a young fellow who worked along with me—we met some one with her mother and father; and from that afternoon I was a changed man.

"I don't know anything about beauty, and features, and that sort of thing; but I know that Jenny Lee's face was the sweetest and brightest I ever saw; and for the rest of the time we were together I could do nothing but feast upon it with my eyes.

"John Ross knew the old people; and when I came to reckon afterwards, I could see plainly enough why my companion had chosen the Glossop Road: for they asked us to walk with them as far as their cottage, which was nigh at hand; and we did, and stayed to tea, and then they walked part of the way back in the cool of the evening. When we parted, and John Ross began to chatter about them, it seemed as if a dark cloud was settling down over my life, and that all around was beginning to look black and dismal.

"'You'll go with me again, Harry?' he said to me

Digitized by Google

as we parted. 'I shan't wait till Sunday, but run over on Wednesday night.'

"'I don't know, I'll see,' I said; and then we parted.

"I went out that afternoon happy and lighthearted, I came back mad and angry. 'He wants me to go with him to talk to the old people, while he can chatter, and say empty nothings to that girl, who is as much too good for him as she is for——'

"'Me!' I said after a pause, for I seemed to grow sensible all at once, and to see that I was making myself what I called rather stupid. Then I began to take myself to task, and to consider about the state of affairs, seeing how that John Ross's visits were evidently favoured by the old people, perhaps by their daughter, and therefore, why was I to thrust myself in the way, and, besides being miserable myself, make two or three others the same?

"'I'll go to bed and have a good night's rest,' I said, 'and so forget all about it.'

"How easy it is to make one's arrangements, but how hard sometimes to follow them out! I had no sleep at all that night; and so far from getting up and going to begin the fresh week's work lighthearted and happy, and determined not to pay any more visits along with John Ross, I was dull, disheartened, and worrying myself as to whether Jenny Lee cared anything for my companion.

"'If she does,' I said to myself, 'I'll keep away, but if she does not, why may she not be brought to think about me?'

"Somehow or another, John Ross had always made companion of me, in spite of our having very dif-

Digitized by Google

GRINDERS AT WORK.

Digitized by Google

ferent opinions upon certain subjects. He was for, and I was strongly against trades unions. He always used to tell me that he should convert me in time; but although we had been intimate for three years, that time had not come yet. On the contrary, certain outrages that had disgusted the working men, had embittered me against the unions. However, we kept friends; and it was not upon that question that he became my most bitter enemy.

"After many a long consultation with myself, I had determined to go with Ross to the Lees only once more, and had gone; but somehow that 'only once more' grew into another and another visit; till from going with John Ross alone, I got into the habit of calling without him, and was always well received. Jenny was pleasant and merry, and chatty, and the old folks were sociable; and the pleasure derived from these visits smothered the remorse I might otherwise have felt, for I could plainly see, from John Ross's manner, how jealous and annoyed he was. And yet his visits always seemed welcome. There was the same cheery greeting from the old folks, the same ready hand-shake from Jenny; but matters went on until, from being friends, John Ross and I furiously hated one another, even to complete avoidance; while, from the honest, matured thoughts of later years, I can feel now that it was without cause, Jenny's feelings towards us being as innocent and friendly as ever dwelt in the breast of a true-hearted English girl.

"But we could not see that, and in turn accused her of lightness and coquetry, of playing off one against the other, and thought bitterly of much that was kindly, true, and well meant.

Digitized by Google

"As may be supposed, such feelings bore bitter fruit. John Ross accused me of treachery, and sowing dissension, ending by desiring, with threats, that I should go to the Lees no more; while I, just as angry, declared that unless forbidden by Jenny, I should go there as frequently as I desired.

"We came to blows. It was during dinner hour, and the wheel was stopped; we had been talking by the dam side, and at last, when in his anger he had struck me, I had furiously returned the blow; then more passed, and after a sharp struggle, I shook myself free, when, unable to save himself, John Ross fell heavily into the deep water, and plunged out of sight for a few moments. But there was no danger, for as he came up he was within reach, and he seized my outstretched hand, and I helped him out, my anger gone, and ready to laugh at him, as he stood there pale and dripping.

"'I shan't forget this,' he said, shaking his fist in my face.

"'Pooh! nonsense, man!' I exclaimed, catching the threatening hand in both mine. 'Let bygones be bygones, and make friends.' But snatching his hand away, he dashed in amongst the trees, and in a few moments was out of sight.

"I did not go up to the Lees that night, but the next evening upon walking up after work-hours, I found John Ross there; and that on all sides I was received with a studied coldness. The old people were quite gruff, and their daughter only replied quietly to my questions. I soon found that my presence acted as a restraint upon the party, and with a reproachful look at Jenny I rose to go.

"I did not see the tears that rose to Jenny's eyes as

Digitized by Google

I left; for I was meeting the triumphant looks of John Ross, and trying to smother down the bitterness that rose in my breast.

"'He must have been poisoning them against me,' I muttered, as I took my solitary way towards the town. 'I wonder what he has said!' then I began to think of how I had come between him and his happiness, and accused myself of selfishness, and at last reached my lodgings determined to fight down my disappointment, and to try to forget it in work.

"I fought hard, and it would be beyond words to tell the misery of my solitary heart as I kept steadfastly from the Lees, working early and late to drive away my thoughts, and too much taken up with my own affairs to observe the strange, sullen way in which I was treated by the other men in the wheel. I did notice John Ross's scowls; but knowing their cause, I did not pay much heed to them, telling myself that I was serving him to the best of my ability, and that if he knew all I suffered, he would only be too glad to offer me the hand of good fellowship.

"'He'll find it out for himself some day,' I said, with a sigh, and went on with my work.

"Of course you know what I mean by the wheel-bands, doctor? You know that to every grindstone there are endless leathern straps, to connect them with the main shafts set in motion by the water-wheel; and by means of these connections each man's stone is made to revolve. As a matter of course, if these bands were removed, a man's grindstone would be motionless, and work impossible; and though such acts were common enough in some wheels, nothing of the kind had taken place on our stream, so that I was perfectly astounded

Digitized by Google

one morning upon going to work to find that my bands had been cut.

"I took it to be meant as a joke, so, though much annoyed, I merely set to, and looking as good-humoured as possible, repaired my bands after a rough fashion, so that, saving one or two breaks down, I managed to get a pretty good day's work done.

"There was plenty of bantering going on, not of a pleasant, jovial kind, but of a sneering, harsh nature, and I went home that night disheartened and put out. I did not give John Ross the credit of the trick, as being too small; and I began to hope, too, that he saw me in my right light. But there was another stab for me that night, for passing along one of the streets whom should I meet but John himself, walking by the side of Jenny Lee and her mother.

"Jenny gazed hard at me, for I moved to her as I passed; but it seemed to me that she only looked on my salute with contempt, and I passed on feeling more bitter than ever.

"The next morning on going to work my bands were gone, and the only reply to my inquiries was a hoarse kind of laughter mingled with jeers. I could see now plainly enough that, probably incited by John Ross, the men intended to make my life so unpleasant at the wheel that I should be glad to seek for work elsewhere.

"'Don't want no such independent men here,' shouted somebody, and several other remarks were made of a like nature.

"'I can give way when I'm in the wrong, John Ross,' I muttered to myself; 'but if you're at the bottom of this, I intend to show you that mine is

Digitized by Google

consistency of behaviour and not cowardice.' So, quietly leaving the wheel, I took no heed of the laughter and jeers of the men, but went back to the town, bought new bands, and, to the surprise of those who had thought me driven away, went on with my work as though nothing had happened.

"'I should take them bands home t'-night, lad,' said one, jeeringly.

"'Ay, they wean't be safe here,' said another.

"But I let them banter away, though I took care that my new bands should not be stolen, rolling them up and carrying them away with me every night when I left off work.

"This only served to increase the animosity of the men, and sneers and sullen looks were hurled at me from morn till night, till at times I began to ask myself whether it would not be wiser to seek elsewhere for work. But I always came to one conclusion—that I was in the right, and that it would be miserable cowardice on my part to give up.

"So I kept on suffering in silence every insult and annoyance, such as, to their disgrace be it said, some working men are only too ready to heap upon any fellow-toiler who has had the misfortune to make himself obnoxious.

"And so matters went on till one morning, when, passing a number of lowering faces, I made my way to my seat, slipped on my bands, and then, not noticing that the others were lingering about against door and window, took up the first of the knife-blades I had to grind, and applied it to the stone. There was the sharp "chirring" noise, the sparks darted away from beneath the blade, and then there was a sharp blinding

Digitized by Google

flash, a dull report, and I felt myself dashed back, scorched, half stunned, and helpless, but still sensible enough to know that some cowardly hand had placed a quantity of gunpowder where the sparks from my stone would fly—a cruel unmanly trick that was not new in those days—and as I lay there and groaned, I believe it was as much from agony of mind as of body; for it seemed so mean, so despicable, that it was hard to believe that men living in a Christian country could be guilty of such an act.

"But there were some there who did not sympathize with the outrage; and three or four lifted me up, and would have taken me to the infirmary, but I begged them to bear me to my lodgings, and then fetch a doctor, and they brought you.

"'I'd tell 'ee, lad, who put in the poother,' said one of them, whispering in my ear, 'but I darn't.'

"'I don't want to know, Jack Burkin,' I groaned, as I lay there in the dark, 'I'd rather not hear;' and as I spoke, my heart seemed to tell me who was my enemy.

"'I wish the poor girl might have chosen a better husband,' I said to myself that night, as I lay there sleepless from pain, when you had done what you could for me, and I lay waiting for the day. Not that I could see it, for all was blank to me now; and as I thought, I pictured myself as I felt I should be in the future—a tall, stout man, with vacant eyes and a seamed and scarred face: for I knew that I was fearfully scorched, and that hair, eyebrows, and lashes were burned off, and my face terribly disfigured.

"It was a bitter time that, but though the pain was still most keen, I laughed at it after the first four-and-

Digitized by Google

twenty hours, glorying in and blessing the day that had laid me helpless there; and I'll tell you the reason why.

"John Ross had overshot the mark, while I had been blinder than I was at the present time, when a happy light darted into my understanding, and I learnt that I was not to be the solitary man I had expected.

"I was lying in pain and bitterness on the afternoon after the accident, all in darkness. You remember you had been to dress my blackened face and hands once more, but you did not give me much comfort when I asked you about my sight."

"'Remember' I said, 'I told you to be hopeful, for I was in great doubt.'

"'And what was I to do when blind?' I asked myself. Certainly, I had saved up a little money, but I knew that would not last long, and that it would be sunken by the doctor's bill.

"'Pity I did not go into the infirmary,' I groaned, and then I felt ready to eat my words, for a sweet little sad voice, that made my heart leap, said, 'May I come in?'

"I could not have answered to have saved my life, but only groan and try to turn away my face, lest she should see it—my blackened and scarred face, disfigured with cotton-wool and dressing, my head with every scrap of hair scorched off—and, had I been able, I should have tried to hide it with my hands, but they too, with my arms, were burned and bandaged, and I could only slightly turn my head and groan, as I thought of my past manly looks, and trembled to be seen by the bright-faced girl who had first made my heart to beat more swiftly.

Digitized by Google

"'May I come in?' was repeated again, but still I could not answer; and then there was the light sound of a step crossing the chamber floor, a rustle by the bedside, and I heard some one go down upon her knees, and felt two little gentle hands laid upon one of my arms, and a sweet little voice sobbing, 'Oh, Harry! oh, Harry! that it should come to this!'

"Speak? I could not speak; and as to pain, I believe, with the exultation then in my heart, I could have borne the keenest pangs that ever fell to the lot of man.

"She did not love John Ross, then, and never had, or she would not have come to me thus to lay bare the secret of her pure young heart. Had I been well and strong, and had the sense to have followed up the opportunity once given, she would have been quiet and retiring; but now, in this perilous time—for I learnt after that I was in danger, and that this was known—Jenny had come to my bedside, like some ministering angel, to tend and comfort me.

"I could speak at last though, even if it was but in a whisper; and in those long hours, as she sat by my bed, all reserve was cast aside; and, speaking as one who only looked upon things as they might have been, I told her how I loved her, and how I had kept away, believing that she would be happier with John Ross.

"I learnt now of his pettiness, of the way in which he had defamed me; but let that pass. I could forgive him all since I learned that he had never gained entrance to the little heart beating by my side. I learned, too, of Jenny's suspicions, aroused by a purchase she had seen the young man make, at a shop in the town, one day when she was not perceived; but I

Digitized by Google

would not have the thought harboured, for I bore him no malice then. And at last I groaned again, and the weak tears forced themselves into my poor smarting eyes as the thought would come of what might have been, and of how I must not indulge in such ideas now, binding the fresh young girl by my side to a scarred and blinded man. I knew that I must be hideous to look upon, but in my ignorance I knew not the heart placed by God in a true woman's breast, and I could only groan again as I felt a little soft cheek laid to mine, cruelly burned as it was, and the tender sympathising voice ask me if I was in much pain.

"'Only of the heart, Jenny,' I whispered, 'as I think of what I might have been.'

"And then her sobbing question, as she asked me not to think it unmaidenly and bold of her to come to me, and to talk as she had done.

"What could I say, but ask God's blessing upon her head as her little light step crossed the floor? And then the brightness seemed to have gone, and all was once more dark.

"Day after day she was at my side, to read to me gentle words of hope and resignation; and when, more than once, I spoke of my altered looks, my scarred face and sightless eyes, telling her how it cut me to the heart to say it, but that all this must end, for I should not be acting as a man if I bound her to such a wreck, spoiling her fair young life, did she not tell me she could love me better than if I had been as I was before, begging me not to send her away, lest I should break her heart?

"And it was almost in happiness that day that I lay there, very weak and helpless. You remember when I

Digitized by Google

gh unto
ıs low an
any mom
gth I had
ost at the
ɜ, as I th
strange
dread;
ɜ little lip
ayers in n
ı the sin
niss, I lay
t long sl
t it would
ɔugh I kr
'as there i
a husbar

ger, ceasi
ly flame—
ɒe would
ing ears.
when the

Digitized by Google

"Jenny had been weeping silently for some time, when, turning to me, she said, gently. 'Don't think me irreverent, Harry, but do you remember how God chose David to be king over his people?'

"I nodded, for my heart seemed swelled unto bursting, and I could not speak.

"'He looked upon the heart,' sobbed Jenny; 'and oh, Harry, I have tried to choose my king like that.'

"People call this world a vale of sorrows, and I pity those who always speak like that, for they can never have felt the happiness that was mine that night, as two fond arms clasped my neck, and a loving cheek was laid to mine, and they were those of her who has been my wife these fifteen happy years.

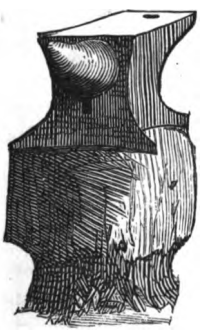
"I believe that there are those who think us a strangely-matched couple, and that our little ones all favour their mother; but they don't know all, for my foolish little wife is even proud of her husband."

"And well she may be!" I said to myself as I went away, thinking what a blot these trade outrages have been upon working-class history, and how generous stout-hearted men often allow themselves to be led away by the mouthing idlers of their workshops—by men who are constantly declaiming against their betters, and who want as they say for all to be free and equal, with as much sense as the child who cried for the moon.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

MY NON-STRIKING PATIENT.



I HAD just such a man as my Sheffield grinder to tend once for a broken leg. Samuel Harris was his name, and a very bad fracture I had to deal with.

He lay there without a murmur as I made my examination and then shook my head.

"Seems nasty, don't it, doctor," he said coolly.

"It's a very serious fracture," I said, "and I'm really afraid,—"

"That I shall lose my leg?" he said, anticipating my words.

"I will try and save it," I replied, "but you must be prepared for amputation at any moment."

"All right doctor," he said, "I'm in your hands. I won't grumble. If you do take it off, though, and it don't kill me, I'll see if I can't contrive something better than those old wooden legs, that some fellows peg about on."

"Well we'll see," I said, "and if you'll look at matters in that cheerful way perhaps we shall get on."

I saved that man's leg: for a more patient fellow

Digitized by Google

under suffering it was impossible to find, and in the course of various conversations with him, we talked of strikes and outrages, and the various trade disputes, and by degrees he talked about himself and his experiences over similar affairs.

"Ah!" he said, "some men can always make plenty of friends without taking any trouble, and some can make plenty of enemies in the same way; and that last seems to have been my luck through life. I suppose as an ordinary mechanic I'm not such a very bad sort, and I'll tell you why: after about a dozen years of married life there's always a pleasant smile to welcome me home—a sweet look that I always answer with a grin which spreads all over my rough, dirty face till it gets lost on each side in my whiskers, and up atop in my hair. Then, too, for all I'm a big, grim-looking fellow, as my mates call Sour Sam, the little ones never seem a bit frightened of me; but one comes and gets hold of my cap, and another my coat, and one come and pulls before, and another comes and pushes behind, till they get me in my chair beside the table; and I know times and times I haven't had half a meal for the young rebels climbing on me; for, somehow or another, if there is any time in the day that goes fast, it's dinner hour. You get sat down, and toss this little one, and play with that, and eat two or three mouthfuls, and then it's time to go back to the shop, and grime yourself up again with steel filings and oil.

"I was such a grim, gruff fellow, that my shopmates took precious little notice of me; and one day, after it had been brewing for some time, they all turned out—hundred and forty of 'em.

Digitized by Google

"Now, I was so took aback, and it come upon me so unexpectedly, that I put on my coat and came out with the rest, and stood outside the gates; but as soon as I was outside, I felt mad at having done so, and would have gone back, only it was too late, and what my shopmates had settled it seemed that I must abide by. So, thinking of how it would end, I walked home, though two or three called me a sneak for not joining their meeting at a public-house hard by. After sitting by the fire for an hour I made up my mind what I should do, and that was to go back to work, for I didn't want to strike, and felt that the treatment we got at the works was quite as good as we deserved; and it didn't seem fair to me to look upon my employer as an enemy because he had had so much better luck in the world than I had. So back I went without a word, and as I got near the gates there were three or four of our chaps hanging about.

"'Where going, Sam?' says one.

"'Works,' I says, gruffly.

"'What for?' he says; and just then some others came up, and then from here and there more and more, till fifty or sixty stood round.

"'I'm going into the works,' I said, roughly, and trying to shove my way on.

"'Well, but what for!' he says, with a sort of half laugh. 'We haven't heard that they've given the rise, but being a favourite you got the news first. Why didn't you tell us, mate?'

"Of course I didn't like his bantering way, nor I didn't like the half laugh which followed; but I said nothing, only tried to push through the crowd, when

Digitized by Google

being brought up short I swallowed down a sort of feeling of rage that seemed to come up my throat, and facing round, I says boldly:

"'Harry Perkins, you're on strike, as yer call it; well, I'm not. You don't mean work: I do; and I'm off into the shop.'

"Well, this seemed to stagger him for a moment, but the next minute half a dozen fellows had hold of me, and I was dragged back right into the middle of the crowd, and the voices I heard naming the pump and river told me I should get some rather rough usage; but the English obstinacy in me began to kick against this treatment, and, shouting out loudly, on the chance of there being some present of my way of thinking, I says:

"'I mean work, mates, and down with the strikers. Who's on my side?' when fifteen or twenty came forward, and then I can't tell you how it was, for I always was hot-blooded; the next minute we all seemed to be raging and tearing at one another in a regular fight; men shouting, and swearing, and striking fiercely at one another; some down and trampled upon; some wrestling together; and the crowd swaying backwards forwards, here and there, and the battle growing more and more bitter every moment.

"You can't see much in a fight like this, when you have an enemy to contend with the whole time; but I saw that the men now all came out in their true colours, and that the sides were evenly balanced, for a good half had turned out more from feeling bound to act as the others did, than from being dissatisfied with the rate of pay; while now, seeing the stand I had made on their side, they felt bound to take my part in return, and, as I

Digitized by Google

said before, the fight grew fiercer every moment, while headed by Perkins, the man who had spoken to me, the other side was making head, and we were being beaten back step by step and driven along a narrow street, but fighting desperately the whole time.

"Every now and then a chap on one side or the other would stagger out bleeding and wild, and make his way on to a doorstep, or up one of the courts that connected the street with the next, and more than one went down with a groan; while by some means or other about eight or nine of our side were driven up a court by some of the other party, when, seeing the chance, I shouted to them to follow, and we all ran hard, pursued by our enemies for twenty yards or so, when they turned back.

"'Come on,' I shouted, and, leading the way, I got into the next street, led them along it a little way, and then turned down the next court. 'Keep together,' I said, 'and we'll take 'em behind;' and the next minute we were back in the street, where our mates still fought on desperately, for in my heart I believe every blow struck on our side was nerved by the thought of home, and those we worked for.

"Next moment we took them in the rear, with a desperate rush, cheering as we did so, and tumbling them over right and left; whilst our mates in front who were just then giving way, cheered again and the fight was hotter than ever. But now, hemmed in between the two parties, the strikers fought desperately, and I caught sight of Perkins with a small hammer in his hand, knocking down first one and then another poor fellow, who crawled out of the struggling mob as well as he could.

Digitized by Google

"There were no police visible, but they could have done nothing if they had been there; but every window was crowded with people, while men's wives came hurrying up, and shrieking to the people looking on to stop the fight.

"Just then I had downed the man opposed to me, when I heard a heavy blow, and turning, saw the man who worked at the next vice to me go down from a crack on the forehead from Perkins's hammer, and the next moment I stood on one side just in time to avoid a blow aimed at me, when the handle caught me on the shoulder, and the hammer-head snapped off, falling upon the ground behind me.

"I believe I was half-mad then with pain and excitement as I leaped at Perkins, and closed with him; when, being both big, stout fellows, and heads of the row, the desperate struggle going on between us seemed to act like magic on the others, who stopped to watch us as we wrestled together here and there—now up, now down, the centre of a busy throng, cheering and shouting us on, as if we had been two wild beasts fighting for their amusement.

"I'm not going to give you a long description of a hard fight, nor of the savage feelings that burned in my brain, as mad with fury I tore at him again and again; for I often look back upon that time with feelings of shame, though I can't help thinking that I only acted as most men would have done in such a case. All I can tell you is that I've a recollection of giving and receiving fierce blows, of falling, being picked up, and being cheered on, and muttering through my set teeth 'It's for those at home,' till there came a fiercer and longer struggle than ever, ending in both

Digitized by Google

falling heavily; and I shall never forget the sickening crash with which my opponent's head came down upon the kerb-stone.

"Then, blind and giddy, I was standing panting there with a policeman hold of each arm, but only to be dragged from him next moment by my mates, who bore me away cheering.

"Early next morning, though, the police were at my place, and I followed them quietly, shuddering as I went, for I heard that Perkins was in a dying state. Then came the examination before the magistrates. and I was remanded a day or two till the doctors had given in their opinion. Our heads of the firm, though, took great interest in the case as soon as they knew all the particulars; and one of the cleverest counsel they could get took my affairs in hand, which ended in my being discharged, for Perkins grew better; but a good many of us were fined pretty smartly for the breach of the peace.

"The workshop was open directly, and quite half the men went back to work; but from that day I began to find out that our town was no place for me. My employers were kind enough, and I was not a penny the worse in pocket for my encounter; but it grew plainer and plainer to me, day by day, that I should be driven out of the place. Threatening letters came; once I was struck down from behind as I came home on a dark night, and though I felt sure the man I caught a glance of was Perkins, I could not swear it. Then came news of the cowardly tricks at Sheffield—throwing powder into houses—and my wife grew pale and ill with apprehension; while what filled the measure up to the brim was my poor lass being set upon and in-

Digitized by Google

sulted one night only a few yards from our door, so near that I heard her call 'Help,' and knew the voice, and ran out.

"The next week I was sitting in our empty room; the floor trampled and dirty with the feet of those who had been to the sale of the things in our bit of a four-roomed house. And the things had sold well, too; for my mates had sent their wives, and one had bought one thing, and another another. But I was down-hearted and sad at seeing first one little familiar thing and then another dragged away, while the thought of being driven out of the place was bitter to me. The wife and children had gone on to London, and there was no one there to see me as something which showed there were weak places in the strong man came into my eyes.

"But I had to choke that down, for a knock came at the door, and it sounded hollow and strange in the empty place. It was a letter; just in time, too, for I was thinking just before of locking up the place and going away, but fancied I should just like one pipe of tobacco for the last where I had spent so many quiet evenings. However, I opened the letter, and then started to run after the postman, feeling that it must be a mistake, for inside was a crisp new twenty-pound note, with a few lines telling me that it was from two friends who regretted the loss to the town and its works, of an honest, upright man, and begging my acceptance of the trifle enclosed, as a testimony of the esteem in which my services had been held.

"Twenty pounds, sir—a larger sum than I had ever before owned at once; but as I'm an honest man I thought more of the words of that letter then than I did of the money; while through being weak, I sup-

Digitized by Google

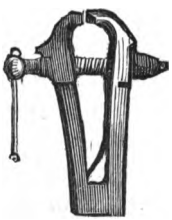
pose, there was a wet spot or two upon the note when I put it away.

"After it was dark that night, I went and thanked those from whom I knew it had come, though they would not own to it; but the senior partner slapped me on the shoulder as I went out, and he said:

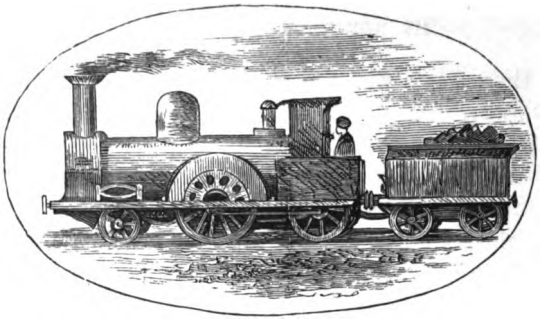
"'There's too much holding aloof between master and man, Samuel Harris; but if all mechanics were like you we should have no more strikes."

"He was quite right," I said, nodding.

"Think so, sir? perhaps he was, perhaps he was not, but depend upon it the best way is to give and take all you can. Striking 's expensive work for both sides; but you see the thing is this—what makes the trouble is that neither side likes to be beat."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER VIII.

MY PATIENT, THE DRIVER.

I WISH I could put Solomon Gann before you in the flesh; for a finer broad-shouldered specimen of humanity I never saw. He was gruff, bluff, swarthy; and rugged as his face was, it always bore a pleasant smile, just as if he had said to you, "Ah! all right; things are rough; but I'm going to take it coolly."

And he was cool; nobody cooler—even in cases of emergency; and a better man for an engine-driver could not have been chosen.

I first met Solomon Gann in connection with an accident at Grandton, where I and other surgeons were called in to attend the sufferers by a collision with a goods train. After that I attended him two or three times; for he came to me in preference to the Com-

Digitized by Google

pany's surgeon, and he used to give me scraps of information about his life, and tell me little incidents in his career.

"Glorious profession, ain't it, Sir," he said. "Grows more important every day, does the railway profession, and is likely to. Ah! people in our great-grandfathers' days would have opened their eyes if you had talked about being an engine-driver; and I ain't much like a four-horse mail coachee, am I? Rum set out, the rail. Not so many years back, and there wasn't such a thing; and now it employs its thousands, beginning with your superintendents, and going down through clerks, and guards, and drivers, and so on, to the lowest porter or cleaner on the line.

"I've had some experience, I have. I was cleaner in the engine-house afore I got put on to stoke; and I'm not going to say that engine-drivers are worse off than other men because I happen to be one: for we want a little alteration right through the whole machine: a little easing in this collar; a little less stuffing there; them nuts give a turn with the screw-hammer; and the iley rag put over the working gear a little more oftener, while the ile-can itself ain't spared. Don't you see, you know, I'm a speaking mettyphorically; and of course I mean the whole of the railways' servants.

"The Public, perhaps—and he's a terrible humbug that fellow Public—thinks we are well paid and discontented; and leaving out danger, let me ask him how he would like to be racing along at express speed through a storm of wind and rain, or snow, or hail, for fifty miles without stopping, blinded almost, cut to pieces almost; or roasting on a broiling summer's day; or

Digitized by Google

running through the pitchiest, blackest night—Sunday and week-day all the year round. 'Well, you're paid for it,' says the public. So we are, and pretty good wages as times goes; but those wages don't pay a man for the wear and tear of his constitution; and though there's so much fuss made about the beauty of the British constitution, and people brag about it to an extent that's quite sickening, when you come down to the small bit of British constitution locked up in a single British person's chest—him being an engine-driver, you know—you'll find that constitution wears, and gets weak, and liable to being touched up with the cold, or heat, or what not; and it's a precious ticklish thing to mend—so now then!

"We don't want to grumble too much, but railway work isn't all lying down on a feather-bed, smoking shag at threepence an ounce, and drinking porter at threepence a pot in your own jugs; we have to work, and think too, or else there would soon be an alteration in the companies' dividends. Accidents will happen, do what we will to stop 'em, and there's no mistake about it, our accidents are, as a rule, bad ones—terrible bad ones, even when life and limb don't get touched. Only an engine damaged, perhaps, but that can easily wear a thousand pound; while a hundred's as good as nothing when a few trucks and coaches are knocked into matchwood. Then, too, when we have a bad 'pitch-in,' as we call it, look at the thousands as the company has to pull out for damages to injured folks. One chap, I see, got seven thousand the other day for having his back damaged; and I don't know but what I'd think it a good bargain to be knocked about to that tune. But, there, they wouldn't think my whole car-

Digitized by Google

case worth half as much. But our work ain't feather-bed work, I can tell you; and as to risk, why, we all of us come in for that more or less, though we get so used to it that we don't seem to see the danger.

"Oh! you'll say 'Familiarity breeds contempt,' or something else fine; but just you come and stoke, or drive, or guard, or be signalman, or pointsman, every day of your life, and just see if you'll pull a blessed long face and be seeing a skillington with a hour-glass in one hand and a harpoon in t'other, ready to stick it into yours or somebody else's wesket every precious hour of the day. It's all werry fine to talk, but a man can't be always thinking of dying when he is so busy thinking about living, and making a living for half-a-dozen mouths at home. I like to be serious, and think of the end in a quiet, proper way, as a man should; but it's my humble opinion as the man who is seeing grim death at every turn and in every movement, has got his liver into a precious bad state, and the sooner he goes to the doctor the better. 'Taint natural, nor it ain't reasonable; and though we often get the credit of being careless, I mean to say we don't deserve it half the times, and the very fact of often being in risky places makes you think nothing of 'em. It's natural, you know, and a wonderful wise thing, too; for if we were always to be thinking of the danger, it's my belief —my honest belief—that your railway accidents would be doubled; for the men would be that anxious and worried that they would work badly, and in a few years knock up altogether, with their nerves shattered to pieces.

"I've been on the line twenty year, and of course I've seen a little in that space, and I could tell you

Digitized by Google

hundreds of things about the different dangers, if I had time. Now, for instance, I'll tell you what's a great danger that some railway servants has to encounter, and that is being at a small country station, say where perhaps very few trains stop in a day. It don't matter whether it's clerk or porter, the danger's the same; there's the fast trains thundering by over and over again, twenty times a day may be, and after a time you get so used to them that *you don't hear them coming;* and many's the time some poor fellow has stepped down to cross the line right in front of one, when—— there, you know the old story, and I've got one horror to tell you, and that will be quite enough, I dare say.

"'Carelessness—want of caution—the man had been years in the company's service, and must have known better,' says the public. But there—that's just it—it's that constant being amongst the perils that makes a man forget things that he ought to recollect; and are you going to try and make me believe a man can have such power over his thinking apparatus that he can recollect everything? He must be a very perfect piece of goods if there is such a one, and one as would go for ever, I should think, without a touch of the iley rag. No spots of rust on him, I'll wager.

"Shunting's hard work—terrible hard work—for men; I mean the shunting of goods trains at the little stations—picking up empty trucks, and setting down the full ones; coupling, and uncoupling; and waving of lanterns, and shouting and muddling about; and mostly in the dark; for, you see, the passenger traffic is nearly all in the day-time, while we carry on the goods work by night. Ah! shunting's queer work where there's many sidings, and you are tripping over

Digitized by Google

point-handles, and rods, or looking one way for the train and going butt on to an empty truck the other way. There's some sad stories relating to shunting—stories of fine young fellows crushed to death in a moment; let alone those of the poor chaps you may see to this day at some of the crossings with wooden legs or one sleeve empty—soldiers, you know, who have been wounded in the battle of life, and I think as worthy of medals as anybody.

"Of course, you know, a 'pitch in' will come some time spite of all care; and I've been in one or two in my time, but never to get hurt. I remember one day going down our line and getting pretty close to a junction where another line crossed the down so as to get on to the up. I knew that it was somewhere about the time for the up train to come along, for it was generally five minutes before me, and I passed it about a couple of miles before I got to the junction—me going fast, it slow. Sometimes we were first, and then it was kept back by signal till we had passed, so that on the day I am talking of, I thought nothing of it that my signal was up 'All clear,' though the up train hadn't crossed, and with my stoker shovelling in the coal, I opened the screamer and on we were darting at a good speed—ours always having been reckoned a fast line.

"All at once, though, I turned as I had never turned before—thoroughly struck aback; for as I neared the station I saw the signal altered, and at the same moment the up train coming round the curve; then it was crossing my line; and it seemed to me that the next moment we should cut it right in two and go on through it. But we were not quite so nigh as that, and before

Digitized by Google

we got close up I had shut off, reversed, and was screwing down the break, for my stoker seemed struck helpless; then I just caught a glimpse of him as he leaped off; there was a crash, and I was lying half stunned back amongst the coal in the tender, and we were still dashing on for nearly a mile before I was quite recovered and the train at a standstill.

"I was half stupid for a bit, and on putting my hand to my head I found that it was bleeding, whilst the screen was bent right down over me, and had saved my life, no doubt. As far as I could see then there was no more damage done to us, and just then the guard came running up and shook hands when he found I'd got off so well.

"'But where's Joe?' he says, meaning my stoker.

"'He went off,' I says, 'just as we went into 'em. How about t'other train?'

"'Let's run back,' he says; and I put her gently back; but all the while in a muddly sort of way, as if I wasn't quite right in my head, which bled powerful. Then there was a good deal of shouting and noise amongst the passengers; but my guard went along the foot-board from coach to coach till he had quieted them all pretty well, and then by that time they signalled to us to stop.

"Not many ruins to see, there wasn't, only the guard's break of the up train, which my engine had struck full, and another few seconds of time would have let us go clear; while how the points didn't throw us off I can't tell, for it's quite a wonder that my train kept on the line.

"The guard's break was knocked all to shivers, of

Digitized by Google

course, but he had jumped out and escaped with a bruise or two; but not so poor Joe, as I soon saw; for when I asked about him, they showed me something lying under a tarpaulin which a doctor was just putting straight again. But of all things that struck me on the day of that accident there was nothing like the face of the poor young fellow as had the management of the signal. I never saw a face so pale and ghastly and frightened before. But there let it rest. I suppose he was frightened and confused at seeing the two trains coming in together; and as better men have done afore now, he lost his nerve.

"Ever kill anyone? What! run him down? Yes, one. Shocking thing, too, and one I don't much like talking about; but then, it was not my fault, and I did my best to save him: but then, what can you do when you're going nearly a mile a minute?

"That was a shunting case, that was, with a goods train, at a little station, past which we on the express down used to go at the rate I said just now. This goods up used to stop there, and be picking up and setting down nearly every day when we passed. I used to give a whistle, and then it was touch and go, and we were thundering along and past them. But one day as we were running along the straight I could see the guard signalling his engine-driver to back a bit to run into a siding, as it came out at the inquest, for some empties, and to do this, what does he do but step on to the down line, and right in front of my train.

"Now all he had to do was to step off again, for he had plenty of time, and keep in the six-foot till we were gone by. I set the whistle going, and I saw his driver waving his hand to him, and a man at the station

Digitized by Google

seemed to me to be shouting; and all this I noticed as we tore along; and then he did not move, while I felt my blood creep like, as I leaned round the screen, holding on to the handle; and just as if he could hear me I shouted to him to take care as I wrenched the handle and signed my stoker to grind down the break.

"But there, bless you, it was impossible to stop, and though I felt no shock, it seems to me that my heart did, and when we pulled up in a wonderful short time, my stoker and I were looking at one another in a queer scared way, for the buffer had caught the poor fellow and driven him along; then the wheels had him, and he was tossed at last into the six-foot to lie with his life-blood soaking into the gravel.

"I'm a big, stout fellow, but as I ran back towards the station I felt sick, and my head was in a whirl; while I seemed to be hearing the thundering-by of the train, the shriek of the whistle, the grinding and screeching of the breaked wheels, and seeing that poor fellow torn to pieces. And then I got close up to the spot where there was something lying, and others were coming up to it, all feeling the same creeping, horrified sensation as they trembled and gathered up the pieces of what had a minute before been one of themselves.

"What ought I to have done? Gone back to my engine, helped the men from the station, thrown sand and ballast over the horrible stains? What ought I to have done? I don't know. But I'll tell you what I did do. I went and sat down on the bank beside the line, and cried like a great girl.

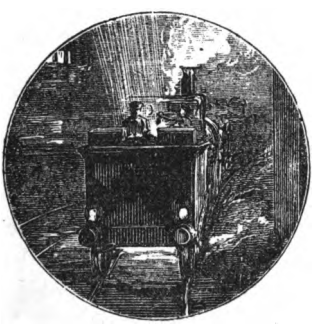
"But no one saw it, for I had my hands over my face, and them down on my knees, while a gentleman from my train, thinking I was faint, gave me some

Digitized by Google

brandy from his flask, and then I went back to my engine and finished my journey.

"No fault of mine, you know, and though in the heat of a fight a man may perhaps strike down another without feeling any sorrow, yet to cause the death of a fellow servant, when in the ordinary daily work of one's life, had something very awful in it, and it was a long time before I could run down past that station without feeling my heart beat faster, and a strange shuddering sensation come over me.

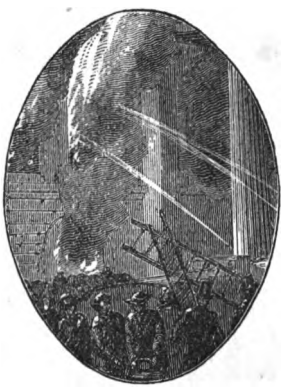
"I could tell you some strange stories of our life, sir, not one of the easiest, but I think we'll stop here for to-day."



Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX.

MY PATIENT AT THE FIRE.



"AND you don't think she'll be marked, sir?"

"No; scarcely at all," I said. "Poor child! she feels the shock more than anything."

"Thank God!" he said, fervently. "I'd sooner have lost my own life than she should have suffered. You see, sir, I get blaming myself for taking her; but she said she would so like to see a pantomime, and I thought it would be such a treat. I don't think I shall ever take her, though, again."

"How did it happen?" I said.

"Ah! that's what nobody seems to know, sir," he said. "It was a terribly full night at the theatre; and though we reached the doors in very good time, with my poor little lassie in high glee, I found we were behind a great many more; and I half wished that I had left work earlier, so as not to disappoint the child.

Digitized by Google

The only pity is, though, that we could get in at all; but we did, and tried to go slowly up the great cork-screw staircase, crowded with good-tempered people, laughing, and pushing their way up. Twice over I felt disposed to give it up; but I thought the child would be so disappointed, and I kept on, taking her upon my back at last when the crowding was worst, and at last getting past the pay barrier, and hurrying up the almost endless steps.

"There was a regular sea of heads before me when I stood at last looking for a favourable spot, and soon finding that taking a seat meant seeing nothing of the performance, I contrived to wedge my way along between two rows of seats occupied by people loud in their protestations that there was no room, till I found a standing-place in front of one of the stout supports of the upper gallery—a pillar that I have always thought of since as the saving of my life.

"I am not going to discuss whether theatres are good or bad places, but I know that night the greatest enjoyment I had was in watching my little girl's animated countenance, as her eyes rested now upon the handsome chandelier, now upon the boxes full of well-dressed people, then half dancing with pleasure at the strains from the orchestra, while her delight bordered almost upon excitement when the curtain drew up and a showy piece was performed.

"Hundreds must have been turned from the doors that night, for, excepting in the principal parts of the house, there was not standing room, while the heat was frightful. In our poor part of the house we had been wedged in till there was not a vacant spot to be seen, and between the acts the men and women, with their

Digitized by Google

baskets of apples and oranges, came forcing their way through, and were terribly angry with me, as I stood leaning against my pillar, for standing in their way.

"All at once I turned all of a cold shiver, and then the blood seemed to run back to my heart, while my hands were wet with perspiration; for quite plainly I had smelt that unmistakable odour of burning wood. I looked about me; all was as it should be; people were eating, drinking, and laughing; the curtain was down, and the orchestra sending out its lively strains.

"'Fancy,' I thought to myself; and I leaned back against my pillar once more, resting my hands upon my child's shoulders, as we stood there exactly opposite the centre of the stage, and consequently as far from the doors as possible; while the recollection of that tremendous corkscrew staircase made me shudder again, and, fancy or no fancy, I took hold of the child's arm, meaning to force myself through the crowd, and get out. Once I nearly started, but hesitated, thinking how disappointed she would be to leave when the best part of the performance was to come; twice I was going, and so hesitated for about five minutes—just long enough to have enabled me to reach the staircase and begin running down. Just five minutes; and then smelling the fire once more, I grasped the child's arm, said 'Come along,' and had made two steps, when I saw that I was too late, and dashed back to where I had stood a minute before, by the pillar.

"I won't call it presence of mind, for fear of being considered vain; but I felt sure that, if I wished to save my child's life, my place was by that pillar in the centre, for I knew the people would rush right and left towards the doors at the first alarm.

Digitized by Google

"And now, what made me start back? why, the sight of several people hurrying towards the door; of one here and another there starting up and looking anxiously round as if aware of coming danger; of people whispering together; and anxious faces beginning to show amongst those which smiled. Then came a dead pause; the band had ceased playing, and the musicians were hurrying out through the door beneath the stage, upsetting their music-stands as they went. Still, people did not move, but seemed wondering, till right at the top above the curtain there was a faint flash of light, and a tiny wreath of faint blue smoke, when a shriek, which rang through the whole place, was heard—the most horrible, despairing cry I ever heard—a cry which acted like a shock to every soul present, and unlocked their voices, for before the eye had seen another flash, the whole audience was afoot, shrieking, yelling, and swaying backwards and forwards in a way most horrible, and never to be forgotten. Box doors crashed, as men flung them open and the hurrying crowd in the passage dashed them to again, making the people shriek more than ever, as they fancied themselves fastened in.

"First one and then another man rushed from behind the curtain upon the stage, moving his arms and speaking; but they might as well have shouted to a storm, as the cry of 'Fire!' rang through the house, and people tore towards the doors. Self, self, self, seemed to be the only thought as men clambered into the upper gallery, or dropped down into ours. Scores climbed down into the boxes; hundreds dashed frantically along, trampling others under foot, and even clambering over the heads of the dense, wedged-in

Digitized by Google

throng, trying to reach the doors; but all hindering one another.

"It would have been a madman's act; but I wanted to run, too, and be one of the surging crowd—to be in action at a time when one's blood ran cold to hear the horrible groans and shrieks of the frightened mob, wedged into a mass, from which now and then a horrid cry rose from a poor wretch beaten down and trampled under foot. I closed my eyes for a moment, but I could see plainly enough the horrors that were going on upon that staircase, and yet I had to fight hard against not only self, but the mob who swayed backwards and forwards past me, some making for one door, some for the other, perhaps only to return again shrieking with horror; while more than one, in climbing over the rails in front of the gallery, fell headlong into the pit.

"As soon as I had been able to collect myself a little, I had caught hold of my child and thrust her at full length beneath the nearest seat, and there she lay, too terrified to move, while people leaped from form to form, over and over her, and I all the time clung desperately to that pillar where I had stood all the evening. More than once I was nearly dragged away; but it acted as a break to the violence of the onslaughts, and whichever way the crowd came, I sheltered myself behind it.

"I felt that it was madness to try and get out, though, had I been alone, I should have tried to reach the pit by climbing from tier to tier; but with a child it was impossible. My best plan seemed to be to follow the example of a grey-haired old man who was holding on by the railings in front of the gallery and calmly,

Digitized by Google

to all appearance, watching the leaping of the fire, though I shuddered as I saw the progress it was making: the curtain was dropping in fiery flakes upon the stage; scenery and woodwork were falling crashing down; while from over the chandelier in the centre of the ceiling a red glowing light kept playing, towards which the smoke floated in wreaths.

"Crash! crash! crash! wings and flies kept falling upon the stage, now from back to front one blaze, from which the sparks, like a golden whirlwind, rushed up amidst the smoke; while the roar became fiercer and fiercer as the currents of air rushed towards the body of flame and fanned it into fresh fury. The glow now fell upon my face, and I turned to fly, for there seemed greater danger in staying than in attempting to escape. The gallery was now nearly empty, though the cries, shouts, and groans from the staircase were still awful.

"I had already leaped over two or three benches, when I remembered the child, and dashed to drag out the little trembling thing, pale and half stifled with the wreathing smoke which spread through the place. The next moment I had her on my back, and hurried to the right-hand door; but here the struggle and turmoil were fearful, and I turned and made my way to the other, climbing over the broken-down barrier at the back of the gallery, beneath which lay two women groaning.

"I looked back: there were the flames, now crawling round the pillars on each side the stage, and licking and playing amongst the curtains of the private boxes. The audience had all gone from the other parts of the house, but men were darting out of the orchestra door, bringing with them loads of anything valuable they could rescue from the flames.

Digitized by Google

"In front of the gallery still sat the old man leaning over the railings, and with a half-dread upon me that something was wrong, I hurried back and shook him heavily, when I started back in horror as he fell across the benches, turning up the most distorted face I ever saw as he lay evidently in a fit from fright.

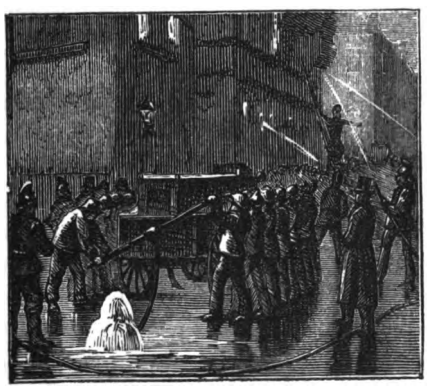
"The flames were coming nearer and nearer, and the smoke grew more and more stifling. The anxiety to be out of this horrible place was intense, but I could not go and leave a fellow-creature helpless in such a situation; so once more making my way to the open door, I set the child down close by the women, leaped back from bench to bench, and somehow contrived to lift the old man and drag him to the top of the staircase, where I staggered against the wall overcome with dread, for the child was gone. 'Had she been taken down the stairs?' I asked the women, and shook them roughly to get an answer, but they were quite insensible. It was too much to bear, and I dashed down the staircase, up which still came the sounds of yelling and struggling, as the people fought their way towards safety; but every here and there the crippled and wounded of the fight were left behind, to slowly crawl downwards, their countenances blanched with horror.

"Round and round, ever downwards, I hurried till I came upon a party of men coming up, headed by a body of policemen—for the staircase was at length open; and in reply to my anxious inquiries, I learnt that they had met someone carrying a child, and the next moment I was down in the entrance catching the little one out of the arms of the man who had turned back to bring her down.

"And now, as I stood there faint and exhausted, I

Digitized by Google

saw first one and then another brought out, crushed and bleeding, till I staggered off, the child taking me home, further and further from the lurid light behind, towards which people were hurrying from all directions; for I was giddy and confused, but none the less thankful for my escape."



Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X.

MY PATIENTS AT THE MINE.

MY residence in Sheffield made me pretty well acquainted with the Yorkshire character, bluff, rough, frank, and hospitable. The first impressions of Yorkshire are perhaps not pleasant, but you soon find that beneath the rough crust there is a great deal that is very warm-hearted and kind.

Upon more than one occasion some terrible accident at one of the coal pits of the South Yorkshire collieries took me out of the town to supply the extra help needed at such a time, and more than once I have been present at terribly heart-rending sights.

I know nothing more shocking, unless it be a wreck, than one of those coal pit accidents, where a shift of men have gone down in robust health to their work, and then there has been a noise like thunder, the news has run like lightning, and the first cry is whose man or whose boy was down.

Digitized by Google

It was during one of those journeys when I had been summoned to help, that, strolling towards a neighbouring pit for the sake of change and rest after a couple of days' very hard toil amongst the injured by fire and the falling of the mine roof, I came upon the manager of the neighbouring mine.

He nodded to me in a familiar way.

"Nice morning," he said.

"Yes, but cold," I replied.

"Yes, it is cold. How are you going on yonder?"

"I don't think there'll be any more deaths," I said. "The poor fellows are getting on now."

"Thank God!" he said with a genuine reverence in his tone of voice, "and keep such an accident far from my pit."

"Amen to that," I replied. "Is this your pit, then?"

"I call it mine," he said laughing, "but it's a company's. I'm manager."

"Indeed," I said, "then perhaps you can gratify my wish to go down."

"Go down?" he said laughing, "Yes, if you'll come and stay with us a night or two."

I hesitated, but he pressed me.

"I should like you to come, doctor. A word or two from you would go well home to my pit-lads who are terribly careless. You being a doctor and a scientific man would be believed."

"How did you know I was a doctor?" I asked.

"How did I know thou wast a doctor? Why didn't I come over to Stannicliffe pit, and see you at work with the poor lads. Say you'll come doctor, you'll do

Digitized by Google

your work better after a change, and I'll send word over that you are here if you're wanted."

"On those conditions I'll come then," I said. "Is that your house?"

"Yes, that's my house under the hillside there, facing the south, where the lights are; you saw it as you came up. Pretty? Well, as pretty as we can make it. Looks like an oasis in a black desert; and hard work it is to keep it decent with so many pits about, each belching out its clouds of villainous smoke black as the coal which makes it; for you see we have not only the fires for the pumping and cage engine, but those at the bottom of the ventilating shafts, and the soot they send floating out into the air is something startling, without counting the sulphurous vapours which ruin vegetation.

"Of course, if you like to go down you can go. I'll go with you. Oh yes: I've often been down. I should think I have! Hundreds of times. Why, I've handled the pick myself in the two-foot seam as an ordinary pitman, though I'm manager now. I don't see any cause to be ashamed of it. And, after all, it's nothing new here in Yorkshire. I could point out a score of men who have been at work in the factories, now holding great works of their own.

"Accidents? Well, yes; we do have accidents, in spite of all precautions and inspection, but not so bad as at Stannicliffe. I'll tell you of one by and by. Now you, coming down to see a coal-pit, look upon it as a dangerous place. Without being cowardly, you'll shudder when we go down the great black shaft a couple of hundred yards, and you'll then walk as if you were going through a powder-magazine. But you know

Digitized by Google

what you used to write in your copy-book at school, 'Familiarity breeds contempt.' Truer words were never written, and I see it proved every week. It's dangerous work going up and down our pit, and yet the men will laugh, and talk, and do things that will almost make your blood run cold. It is like throwing a spark amongst gunpowder to open a lamp in some parts of our mine; but our men, for the sake of a pipe, will run all risks, even to lighting matches on the walls, and taking naked candles to stick up, that they may see better to work.

"Yes, we've had some bad accidents here, but I shall never forget one that happened five-and-twenty years ago. Tell you about it? Good: but it shall be after tea, by the warm fireside, and then if you like to go down the pit in the morning, why, go you shall.

"There, that's cosy. This is the time I always enjoy—after tea, with the curtains drawn; the wind driving the snow in great pats against the window-panes as it howls down the hillside, and makes the fire roar up the chimney. Not particular over a scuttle of coals here, you see. One of your London friends was down once, and he declared that if he lived here he should amuse himself all day long with poker and shovel.

"And now, about this story of the accident I promised—only to hear this you must learn a little more beside. *You* needn't go out of the room, my dear.

"Well, as I told you, it was five-and-twenty years ago, and I was just five-and-twenty years old then—working as regular pitman on the day or night shift. Dirty work, of course, but there was soap in the land

Digitized by Google

even in those days; and when I came up, after a good wash and a change, I could always enjoy a read, such times as I didn't go to the night-school, where, always having been a sort of reading fellow, I used to help teach the boys, and on Sundays I used to go to the school and help there.

"Of course it was all done in a rough way, for hands that had been busy with a coal-pick all day were not, you will say, much fit for using a pen at night. However, I used to go, and it was there I found out that teaching was a thing that paid you back a hundred per cent. interest, for you could not teach others without teaching yourself.

"But—I may as well own to it—it was the teaching at the Sunday-school I used to look forward to, for it was there I used to see Mary Andrews, the daughter of one of our head pitmen. He was not so very high up, only at the pit village he lived in one of the best houses, and had about double the wages of the ordinary men.

"Consequently, Mary Andrews was a little better dressed and better educated than the general run of girls about there; and there was something about her face that used, in its quiet earnestness, to set me anxiously watching her all the time she was teaching, till I used to wake up of a sudden to the fact that the boys in my class were all at play, when, flushing red all over the face, I used to leave off staring over to the girls' part of the big school-room, and try to make up for lost time.

"I can't tell you when it began, but at that time I used somehow to associate Mary Andrews' pale innocent face with everything I did. Every blow I

Digitized by Google

drove into a coal-seam with my sharp pick used to be industry for Mary's sake. Of an evening, when I washed off the black and tidied up my hair, it used to be so that she might not be ashamed of me if we met; and even every time I made my head ache with some calculation out of my arithmetic—ten times as difficult because I had no one to help me—I used to strive and try on till I conquered, because it was all for Mary's sake.

"Not that I dared to have told her so, I thought, but somehow the influence of Mary used to lift me up more and more, till I should no more have thought of going to join the other pitmen in a public-house than of trying to fly.

"It was about this time that I got talking to a young fellow about my age who worked in my shift. John Kelsey his name was, and I used to think it a pity that a fine clever fellow like he was, handsome, stout, and strong, should be so fond of the low habits, dog-fighting and wrestling, so popular amongst our men, who enjoyed nothing better than getting over to Sheffield or Rotherham for what they called a day's sport, which generally meant unfitness for work during the rest of the week.

"'Well,' said John, 'your ways seem to pay you,' and he laughed and went away; and I thought no more of it till about a month after, when I found out that I was what people who make use of plain simple language call in love, and I'll tell you how I found it out.

"I was going along one evening past old Andrews' house, when the door opened for a moment as if some one was coming out, but, as if I had been seen, it was closed directly. In that short moment, though, I had

Digitized by Google

heard a laugh, and that laugh I was sure was John Kelsey's.

"I felt on fire for a few moments, as I stood there unable to move, and then as I dragged myself away the feeling that came over me was one of blank misery and despair. I could have leaned my head up against the first wall I came to and cried like a child; but that feeling passed off to be succeeded by one of rage. For, as the blindness dropped from my eyes, I saw clearly that not only did I dearly love Mary Andrews—love her with all a strong man's first love, such a love as one would feel who had till now made his sole companions of his books—but that I was forestalled, that John Kelsey was evidently a regular visitor there, and, for aught I knew to the contrary, was her acknowledged lover.

"I did not like playing the spy; but, with a faint feeling of hope on me that I might have been mistaken, I walked back past the house, and there was no mistake, John Kelsey's head was plainly enough to be seen upon the blind, and I went home in despair.

"How I looked forward to the next Sunday, half resolved to boldly tell Mary of my love, and to ask her whether there was any truth in that which I imagined, though I almost felt as if I should not dare.

"Sunday came at last, and somehow I was rather late when I entered the great school-room, one end of which was devoted to the girls, the other to the boys. At the first glance I saw that Mary was in her place; at the second all the blood in my body seemed to rush to my heart, for there, standing talking to the superintendent, was John Kelsey, and the next minute he had a class of the youngest children placed in his charge, and he was hearing them read.

Digitized by Google

"'He has done this on account of what I said to him,' was my first thought, and I felt glad; but directly after I was in misery, for my eyes rested upon Mary Andrews, and that explained all—it was for her sake he had come.

"I don't know how that afternoon passed, nor anything else, only that as soon as the children were dismissed I saw John Kelsey go up to Mary's side and walk home with her; and then I walked out up the hillside, wandering here and there amongst the mouths of the old unused pits half full of water, and thinking to myself that I might just as well be down there in one of them, for there was no more hope or pleasure for me in this world.

"Time slipped on, and I could plainly see one thing that troubled me sorely; John was evidently making an outward show of being a hardworking fellow, striving hard for improvement, so as to stand well in old Andrews' eyes, while I knew for a fact that he was as drunken and dissipated as any young fellow that worked in the pit.

"I could not tell Andrews this, nor I could not tell Mary. If she loved him it would grieve her terribly, and be dishonourable as well, and perhaps he might improve. I can tell him though, I thought, and I made up my mind that I would; and meeting him one night, evidently hot and excited with liquor, I spoke to him about it.

"'If you truly love that girl, John,' I said, 'you'll give up this sort of thing.'

"He called me a meddling fool, said he had watched me, that he knew I had a hankering after her myself, but she only laughed at me; and one way and another

Digitized by Google

so galled me that we fought. I went home that night bruised, sore, and ashamed of my passion; while he went to the Andrews' and said he had had to thrash me for speaking insultingly about Mary.

"I heard this afterwards, and I don't know how it was but I wrote to her telling her it was false, and that I loved her too well ever to have acted so.

"When next we met I felt that she must have read my letter and laughed at me. At all events, John Kelsey did, and I had the mortification of seeing that old Andrews evidently favoured his visits.

"John still kept up his attendance at the school, but he was at the far end; and more than once when I looked up it was to find Mary Andrews with her eyes fixed on me. She lowered them though directly, and soon after it seemed to me that she turned them upon John.

"It seems to me that a man never learns till he is well on in life how he should behave towards the woman of his choice, and how much better it would be if he would go and, in a strightforward, manly fashion, tell her of his feelings. I was like the rest, I could not do it; but allowed six months to pass away over my head.

I was sitting over my breakfast before starting for work, when I heard a sound, and knew what it meant before there were shrieks in the village, and women running out and making for the pit's mouth a quarter of a mile away. I tell you I turned sick with horror, for I knew that at least twenty men would be down on the night shift; and though it was close upon their leaving time, they could not have come up yet.

"'Pit's fired! pit's fired!' I heard people shriek-

Digitized by Google

ing; not that there was any need, for there wasn't a soul that didn't know it, the pit having spoken for itself. And as I hurried out I thought all in a flash like of what a day it would be for some families there, and I seemed to see a long procession of rough coffins going to the churchyard, and to hear the wailings of the widow and the fatherless.

"There was no seeming, though, in the wailings, for the poor frightened women, with their shawls pinned over their heads, were crying and shrieking to one another as they ran on.

"I didn't lose any time, as you may suppose, in running to the pit's mouth, but those who lived nearer were there long before me; and by the time I got there I found that the cage had brought up part of the men and three who were insensible, and that it was just going down again.

"It went down directly; and just as it disappeared who should come running up, pale and scared, but Mary Andrews. She ran right up to the knot of men who had come up, and who were talking loudly, in a wild, frightened way, about how the pit had fired—they could not tell how—and she looked from one to the other, and then at the men who were scorched, and then she ran towards the pit's mouth where I was.

"'There's no one belonging to you down, is there?' I asked her.

"'Oh yes—yes! my father was down, and John Kelsey.'

"As she said the first words, I felt ready for anything; but as she finished her sentence, a cold chill came over me, and she saw the change, and looked at me in a strange, half-angry way.

Digitized by Google

"'Here comes the cage up,' I said, trying hard to recover myself, and going up to the bank by her side; but when half-a-dozen scorched and blackened men stepped out, and we looked at their disfigured faces, poor Mary gave a low wail of misery, and I head her say, softly, 'Oh, father! father! father!'

"It went right to my heart to hear her bitter cry, and I caught hold of her hand.

"'Don't be downhearted, Mary,' I said huskily; 'there's hope yet.'

"Her eyes flashed through her tears, as she turned sharply on me; and pressing her hand for a moment, I said, softly, 'Try and think more kindly of me, Mary.' And then I turned to the men.

"'Now, then, who's going down?'

"'You can't go down,' shouted half-a-dozen voices; 'the choke got 'most the better of us.'

"'But there are two men down!' I cried, savagely. 'You're not all cowards, are you?'

"Three men stepped forward, and we got in the cage.

"'Who knows where Andrews was?' I cried; and a faint voice from one of the injured men told me. Then I gave the warning, and we were lowered down; it having been understood that at the first signal we made we were to be drawn up sharply.

"The excitement kept me from being frightened; but there was a horrid feeling of oppression in the air as we got lower and lower, and twice over the men with me were for being drawn up.

"'It steals over you before you know it,' said one.

"'It laid me like in a sleep when Rotherby pit fired,' said another.

Digitized by Google

"'Would you leave old Andrews to die?' I said, and they gave in.

"We reached the bottom, and I found no difficulty in breathing, and, shouting to the men to come on, I ran in the direction where I had been told we should find Andrews; but it was terrible work, for I expected each moment to encounter the deadly gas that had robbed so many men of their lives. But I kept on, shouting to those behind me, till all at once I tripped and fell over some one; and as soon as I could get myself together, I lowered the light I carried, and, to my great delight, I found it was Andrews.

"Whether dead or alive I could not tell then; but we lifted him amongst us, and none too soon, for as I took my first step back I reeled, from a curious giddy feeling which came over me.

"'Run if you can,' I said faintly; for my legs seemed to be sinking under me. I managed to keep on, though, and at our next turn we were in purer air; but we knew it was a race for life, for the heavy gas was rolling after us, ready to quench out our lives if we slackened speed for an instant. We pressed on, though, till we reached the cage, rolled into it, more than climbed, and were drawn up, to be received with a burst of cheers, Mary throwing her arms round her father's neck, and sobbing bitterly.

"'I'm not much hurt,' he said feebly, the fresh air reviving him, as he was laid gently down. 'God bless those brave lads who brought me up! But there's another man down—John Kelsey.'

"No one spoke, no one moved; for all knew of the peril from which we had just escaped.

"'I can't go myself, or I would,' said Andrews;

Digitized by Google

'but you musn't let him lie there and burn. I left him close up to the lead. He tried to follow me, but the falling coal struck him down. I believe the pit's on fire.'

"There was a low murmur amongst the men, and some of the women wailed aloud; but still no one moved except old Andrews, who struggled up on one arm, and looked up at us, his face black, and his whiskers and hair all burnt off.

"'My lads,' he said feebly, "can't you do nothing to save your mate?' and as he looked wildly from one to the other, I felt my heart like in my mouth.

"'Do you all hear?' said a loud voice; and I started as I saw Mary Andrews rise from where she had knelt holding her father's hand; 'do you all hear?—John Kelsey is left in the pit. Are you not men enough to go?'

"'Men can't go,' said one of the day-shift, gruffly; 'no one could live there.'

"'You have not tried,' again she cried passionately. 'Richard Oldshaw,' she said, turning to me with a red glow upon her face, 'John Kelsey is down there dying, and asking for help. Will not you go?'

"'And you wish me to go, then?' I said, bitterly.

"'Yes,' she said. 'Would you have your fellow-creature lie there and die, when God has given you the power and strength, and knowledge to save him?"

"We stood there then, gazing in one another's eyes.

"'You love him so that you can't even help risking my life to save his, Mary. You know how dearly I love you, and that I'm ready to die for your sake; but it seems hard—very hard to be sent like this.'

Digitized by Google

"That was what I thought, and she stood all the time watching me eagerly, till I took hold of her hand and kissed it; and though she looked away then, it seemed to me as though she pressed it very gently.

"The next minute I stepped up towards the pit's mouth, where there was a dead silence, for no one would volunteer; and, in a half blustering way, I said, 'I'll go down.'

"There was a regular cheer rose up as I said those words; but I hardly heeded it, for I was looking at Mary, and my heart sank as I saw her standing there smiling with joy.

"'She thinks I shall save him,' I said to myself, bitterly, 'Well, I'll do it, if I die in the attempt; and God forgive her, for she has broken my heart.'

"The next minute I had stepped into the cage, and it began to move, when a voice calls out, 'Hang it all, Dick Oldshaw shan't go alone!' and a young pitman sprang in by my side.

"Then we began to descend, and through an opening I just caught sight of Mary Andrews falling back senseless in the arms of the women. Then all was dark, and I was nerving myself for what I had to do.

"To go the way by which I had helped to save Andrews, was, I knew, impossible; but I had hopes that by going round by one of the old workings we might reach him, and I told my companion what I thought.

"That's right—of course it is,' he said slapping me on the back. 'That's books, that is. I wish I could read.'

"Turning short off as soon as we were at the bottom, I led the way, holding my lamp high, and climbing

Digitized by Google

and stumbling over the broken shale that had fallen from the roof; for this part of the mine had not been worked for years. Now we were in parts where we could breathe freely, and then working along where the dense gas made our lamps sputter and crackle; and the opening of one for an instant would have been a flash, and death for us both. Twice over I thought we had lost our way; but I had a plan of the pit at home, and often and often I had studied it, little thinking it would ever stand me in such good stead as this; and by pressing on I found that we were right, and gradually nearing the point at which the accident had occurred.

"As we got nearer, I became aware of the air setting in a strong draught in the direction in which we were going, and soon after we could make out a dull glow, and then there was a deep roar. The pit was indeed on fire, and blazing furiously, so that as we got nearer, trembling—I'm not ashamed to own it, for it was an awful sight—there was the coal growing of a fierce red heat; but, fortunately, the draught set towards an old shaft fully a quarter of a mile farther on, and so we were able to approach till, with a cry of horror, I leaped over heap after heap of coal, torn from the roof and wall by the explosion, to where, close to the fire lay the body of John Kelsey—so close that his clothes were already smouldering; and the fire scorched my face as I laid hold of him and dragged him away.

"How we ever got him to the foot of the shaft I never could tell; for to have carried him over the fallen coal of the disused galleries would have been impossible. It was either to risk the gas of the regular way, or to lie down and die by his side. I remember
 there for a few moments, and sending a

Digitized by Google

"ARE YOU NOT MEN ENOUGH TO GO?"—(p. 110).

Digitized by Google

prayer up to Him who could save us; and then with a word to my mate, we had John up between us, and staggered towards the shaft in a strange, helpless, dreamy way. To this day it seems to me little less than a miracle how we could have lived; but the fire must have ventilated the passages sufficiently to allow us to stagger slowly along till we climbed into the cage, and were drawn up.

"I have some faint recollection of hearing a cheer, and of seeing the dim light of the chill December day; but the only thing which made any impression upon me was a voice which seemed to be Mary's, and a touch that seemed to be that of her hand. I heard a voice saying 'Terribly burned, but he's alive. Got a pipe and matches in his hand;' and I knew they were speaking about John Kelsey, and the thought came upon me once more that I had saved him for her; and with an exceeding bitter cry, I covered my poor fire blinded eyes, and lay there faint and half-insensible.

"And it's not much more that I can recollect, only of being in a wild, feverish state, wandering through dark passages, with fire burning my head, and coal falling always, and ready to crush me; and I then seemed to wake from a long, deep sleep, and to lie thinking in a weak, troubled way about getting up.

"It was a month, though, before I could do that, and then there was a tender arm to help me, and a soft cheek ever ready to be laid to mine; for in those long, weary hours of sickness Mary had been by my side to cheer me back to health, and I had learned that I was loved."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI.

MY SCALDED PATIENT.

"THANKY doctor. Eh? feel faint? not a bit. Why bless your heart, I could bear twice as much without winking. Scalding ain't nice, though."

My patient, a frank, open-faced fellow, smiled as if he liked it all the same.

"There's something wrong with your boiler work, my man," I said, "or we should not have so many explosions. How is it?"

"Can't say, I'm sure, sir. Been used to bilers all my life; but working 'em's different to making 'em. There's something wrong, as you say, or they wouldn't always be a-bustin'. 'Tain't once, nor twice, nor now and then, for it's a thing as is always a-happening; and though I've never had more than a scald or two myself, I've seen some strange sights; men all blown to pieces, so that they were picked up afterwards in baskets; men taken to the hospital with their flesh

Digitized by Google

hanging to them in rags, and there they'd lie writhing and tearing at the wrappings in such agony, that—there, I ain't above owning it—I've cried like a child to see my poor mates' sufferings. And there they'd be day after day, till a sort of calm came over them and the pain went, when they'd quite smile if you spoke to 'em, they seemed so easy; and it would be because a gentle hand was laid upon 'em, and they were going into the long sleep.

"Some gets better, but not when they're scalded badly; for it's strange stuff, is steam. Well, no; I'm not afraid, and never do feel afraid. What's the good? One's got it to do, and there's the mouths at home to feed, so one can't afford it; and then the odds are precious long ones against it's being one's own bustin'. But now so many more steam engines are coming into use, day by day, it seems as if something ought to be done in the way of making bilers stronger. Cheapness is cheapness; but then a thing's dear at any price that makes such ruin as I've seen sometimes; so why don't they try some tougher metal than iron?—though certainly steam's strong enough to tear up anything. But there seems to me to be some fresh plan wanted for making bilers. I didn't work there, but I went and had a look d'reckly after that horrible accident at the Big Works last autumn. Well, there was about an acre of buildings—sheds and setrer—swept away as if you'd batter'd 'em all down: great fire bricks weighing a hundred and a half, pitched here and there like chaff; sheets of lead sent flying a hundred yards; tall chimneys powdered down; and the big busted biler itself jumped right out of its place; while as to the middle of it, that was torn off and crumpled up, and

Digitized by Google

blown like a sheet of paper, to a distance. Plenty of life lost there, and plenty of escapes; but what I took most notice of was the plates torn off the biler—torn off as I said before, like so much paper; while these sheets or plates of iron, had given way at the rivets, and looked for all the world like postage stamps—torn off, of course, along the perforating.

"'Now then,' I says to myself, 'that's a thing as wants altering. You perforate the edges of your plates to admit rivets, and so takes half their strength off—p'r'aps more; then you puts, perhaps, hot rivets in, and they p'r'aps crystallizes the iron'—only p'r'aps, mind, I don't say so, only the raw edges of the biler looked crystally and brittle. 'Well, then, some day comes a hextry pressure o' steam, and up goes your biler—busted, and spreading ruin and death and misery around.'

"'Then how are we to fasten our biler plates,' says you, 'if we don't rivet 'em?' How should I know? I ain't a scientific man—I only stokes. That's for you to find out. But you ain't a-going to tell me, are you, that you scientific men and biler makers can't find no other way to make bilers only by riveting them? Say you bends the plates' edges over, and hooks one into the other like tin sarspan makers does their tin. They'd stand some strain that way, and you wouldn't weaken your plates. I ain't a biler maker or I should try that dodge, I think; but there, that's only one way out of many as could be found by experiment.

"Seems to me, sir, as if we English people hates anything new, and always wants to keep to what our fathers and grandfathers had before us. They went along and made their footmarks, and we go along after

Digitized by Google

'em, putting our feet in just the same spots, thinking it must be right, come what will of it.

"Had to do with engines many years. Stoked locomotives and stationaries, agricultural and manufacturies, and printing offices, and been down in the engine-rooms of steamers; and that last's about the hottest and worst of all. Killing work, you know, for anybody, 'specially in a hot country, where every breath of air that comes down to you is already roasted, as it were, and don't do you no good.

"Bustins? Well, no, only one, and that was quite enough; for though it didn't hurt my body, it did hurt my heart, and if you happen to be a father you'll understand what I mean.

"It was-dinner time at our works—a great place where the engine used to be going to pump water night and day, so that there was two of us; and one week I'd be on daywork, next week night work, and so on. Now it so happened that our water in that part was terribly hard—water that would cover the inside of a biler with thick fur in no time. But whether it was that or no, I can't say; all I know is, that one dinner-time I went out into the yard to wash my hands and have a cooler, when I heard a strange, wild, rushing noise, and felt something hit me on the back of the head. Then turning round, I stood fixed to the spot, for the air was black with tiles, and bricks and laths and rafters, while the whole place seemed to be crumbling up together—just like as if you'd built up a tall card house, and then tapped it so that it fell, one card on top of another, till there was a little heap all lying close and snug; till out of a tall building there was nothing left but some smoking ruins.

Digitized by Google

"I knew it was not my fault; for I'd looked at the gauge just before, and the pressure of steam wasn't heavy. I knew there was plenty of water in the biler and the safety valve was all right; so that all I could do was to be thankful for the accident happening at dinner-time, and also for my own wonderful escape. And then, though I wasn't hurt, something seemed to come over me like a flash, and struck me to the ground in an instant.

"When I came to, I felt horribly sick and deathly like, and looked about from face to face, wondering what was the matter; for I couldn't make out why I should be lying on my back, with people round me in the yard—one holding up my head, and another sprinkling my face with water.

"Then it all came back at once, and I shuddered as I turned my head and looked at the ruined works; for I knew what it was struck me down to the earth. I said before it was like a flash, and it was—it was one quick thought which came across my brain, for I knew that, being dinner-time, my little golden-haired gal would have brought my 'lowance tied up in a basin; and something told me that she had gone into the stokehole to find me when I had gone into the yard.

"'Let me get up,' I says, and I ran towards the ruins and began tearing away at the heap of brick rubbish, while the crowd now gathered together, hearing that there was some one underneath, began tearing away at the rubbish like fury.

"By-and-by the police came, and some gentlemen, and something like order was got at, and the people worked well to get down to where the stokehole had been. I had said that there was someone there, but

Digitized by Google

I couldn't shape my mouth to say who it was; and some said it was one man, and some another; but whoever they named seemed to come directly, back from his dinner, or because he had heard the explosion. So, by-and-by, people began to look from one to another, and ask who it was.

"'Ask Wilum,' says some one, 'he was here at the time;' and some one asked me. But I had no occasion to speak, for just then, alarmed at the child's not going back as usual, the little gal's mother came shrieking out and crying—

"'Where's little Patty? where's little Patty?' and then, when no one spoke, she gave a sort of pitiful moan, and sank slowly down—first on her knees, and then sideways on to a heap of bricks; and I remember thinking it was best, for I could not find it in my heart to go to her help, but kept on tearing away at the hot bricks and rubbish.

"It was puzzling and worriting; for one could not seem to be sure of where anything had once stood, in the horrible confusion before us. One said the stoke-hole had been here, and another there; but even I who had worked there two years, could not be sure.

"Hour after hour went by, and still we worked on; while as every big rafter or beam was lifted and dragged away, I was obliged to turn my head, for I felt sick, and the place seemed to swim, for I expected to see Patty's little bright curls torn out and hanging to the jagged wood, and that underneath there would be something horrible and crushed.

"I know it wasn't manly; but what can I say, when there was a little bright, blue-eyed child in the case—one of those little things whose look will make

Digitized by Google

your great rough hand fall to your side when raised in anger, while the tiny thing can lead you about and do what she likes with you? P'r'aps I ain't manly; but somehow, children always seems to get the upper hand of me.

"And so on we worked, hour after hour; men getting tired and dropping off, but always plenty more ready to take their places; while I—I never thought of it, and kept on tearing away till my hands bled, and the sweat ran down my face; but I turned away every time there was something large lifted, for I said to myself 'She must be under that!' And then again and again, in my mind, I seemed to see the torn and crushed face of my darling, and her long curls dabbled in blood.

"In the midst of the piled-up, blackened ruins—bricks, mortar, tiles, lead, and ragged and split beams, huge pieces of wood snapped and torn like matches—we toiled on hour after hour till the dark night came, when the gas pipes that had been laid bare and plugged were unstopped, and the gas lit, so that it flared and blazed and cast a strange wild light over the ruined place. There had been flames burst forth two or three times from parts of the ruins, but a few sprinklings from the fire engine in attendance had put them out; and as we worked on the rubbish grew cooler and cooler.

"Some said that the child could not have been there, but the sight of her mother tearing out was sufficient, when once she got away from the kind people who had her in their house—a house where but part of the windows had been broken by the explosion—and came running to where I was at work, snatching at the bricks and wood, till I got two or three to take her back

Digitized by Google

for I couldn't have left where I was to have saved my life. But I remember so well asking myself why it was that women will let down their back hair when they're in a state of excitement, and make 'emselves look so wild.

"By-and-by someone came to say how bad my wife was, and that she wanted to see me; but I felt that I couldn't go, and kept on in a fevered sort of way, work, work; and I've thought since that if she had been dying it would have been all the same. However, I heard soon after that she seemed a little better; and I found out afterwards that a doctor there had given the poor thing something that seemed to calm her and she went to sleep.

It would have been a strong dose, though, that would have sent me off to sleep, as still on, hour after hour, I worked there, never tiring, but lifting beams that two or three men would have gone at, and tossing the rubbish away like so much straw.

The owners were kind enough, and did all they could to encourage the men, sending out beer and other refreshments; but the heap of stuff to move was something frightful, and more than once I felt quite in despair, and ready to sit down and weakly cry. But I was at it again the next moment, and working with the best of them.

"'Hadn't you better leave now?' said one of my masters; 'I'll see that everything is done.'

"I gave him one look, and he laid his hand kindly on my shoulder, and said no more to me about going; and I heard him say, 'Poor fellow!' to some one by him, as he turned away.

"We came upon the biler quite half-a-dozen yards

Digitized by Google

out of its place, ripped right across where the rivers went; while as for the engine, it was one curious bit of iron tangle—rods, and bars, and pieces of iron and brass, twisted and turned and bent about, like so much string; and the great flywheel was broken in half-a-dozen places.

"This showed us now where the great cellar-like place—the stoke-hole—was; and we worked down now towards that; but still clearing the way, for how could I tell where the child might be? But it was weary, slow work; every now and then rigging up shears, and fastening ropes and pulley and sheaf, to haul up some great piece of iron or a beam; and willing as every one was, we made very little progress in the dark night.

"Once we had to stop and batter away a wall with a scaffold pole; for the police declared it to be unsafe, and the sergeant would not let us work near it till it was down; and all the while I was raging like a madman at the check. But it was of no use, and the man was right. He was doing his duty, and not like me, searching for the little crushed form of my darling in the cruel ruins. The people made me worse, for they would talk and say what they thought, so that I could hear. One would say she might still be alive, another would shake his head, and so on; when I kept stopping, in spite of all I tried not, listening to what they said, and it all seemed so much lost time.

"The engine-room was now cleared, and in spite of my trembling and horror, as every big piece was disturbed, nothing had been found; but all at once, as we were trying to clear behind the biler, and get down to

Digitized by Google

the stoke-hole, one of the men gave a cry. I caught at the man nearest to me, and then lights, rubbish, the strange wild scene, all seemed to run round me, and I should have fallen only the man held me up, and some one brought me some brandy.

"I was myself again directly, and stumbling over the bricks to where a knot of men had collected, and a policeman had his bull's-eye lantern open, and they were stooping to look at something that lay just under a beam they had raised—to the left of where I expected she would be found.

"'Smashed,' I heard some one, with his back to me, say; and then some one else, 'Poor little thing, she must have run past here!'

"Then, with my throat dry and my eyes staring, I crept up and thrust two men aside, right and left, when the others made way for me without speaking, and, when I got close up, I covered my face with my hands, and softly knelt down.

"The policeman said something, and some one else spoke cheerily; but I couldn't hear what they said, for my every thought was upon what I was going to see. And now, for the first time, the great, blinding tears came gushing from my eyes, so that when I slowly took down first one hand and then another, I was blinded, and could not see for a few moments; till, stooping a little lower, there, smashed and flattened, covered with mortar and dust, was my old red cotton handkercher tied round the basin and plate that held my dinner, dropped here by my little darling girl.

"For a few moments I was, as it were, struck dumb —it was so different a sight to what I had expected to

Digitized by Google

see; and then I leaped up and laughed, and shouted, and danced—the relief was so great.

"'Come on!' I cried again; and then, for an hour or more, we were at it, working away till the light began to come in the east, and tell us that it was day-break.

"Late as it was, plenty of people had stopped all the time; for, somehow or another, hundreds had got to know the little bright, golden-haired thing that trotted backwards and forwards every day with my dinner basin. She was too little to do it, but then, bless you, that was our pride; for the wife combed and brushed and dressed her up on purpose. And fine and proud we used to be of the little thing, going and coming—so old-fashioned. Why, lots of heads used to be thrust out to watch her; and seeing how pretty, and artless, and young she was, we used to feel that every one would try and protect her; and it was so. Time after time, that night, I saw motherly-looking women, that I did not know, with their aprons to their eyes, sobbing and crying; and though I didn't notice it then, I remembered it well enough afterwards—ah! and always shall; while the way in which some of the men worked—well-to-do men, who would have thought themselves insulted if you'd offered 'em five shillings for their night's job—showed how my poor little darling had won the hearts of all around. Often and often since, too, I could have stopped this one, and shook hands with that one for their kindness; only there's always that shut-upness about an Englishman that seems to make him all heart at a time of sorrow, and a piece of solid bluntness at every other time.

"Well, it was now just upon morning, and we were

Digitized by Google

all worked up to a pitch of excitement that nothing could be like. We had been expecting to come upon the poor child all the afternoon and night, but now there could be no doubt of it. She must be here; for we were now down in the stoke-hole, working again with more vigour than had been shown for hours. Men's faces were flushed, and their teeth set. They didn't talk, only in whispers; and the stuff went flying out as fast as others could take it away.

"'Easy, easy,' the sergeant of police kept saying, as he and two of his men kept us well lit with the strong light of their lanterns.

"But the men tore on, till at last the place was about cleared out, and we had got to a mass of brick wall sloping against one side, and a little woodwork on the other side, along with some rubbish.

"And now was the exciting time, as we went, four of us, at the brick wall, and dragged at it, when some women up above shrieked out, and we stood trembling, for it had crumbled down and lay all of a heap where we had raised it from.

"'Quick!' I shouted, huskily. And we tore the bricks away till there was hardly a scrap left, and we stood staring at one another.

"'Why, she ain't here, arter all!' says a policeman.

"'I'm blest,' says another.

"But I couldn't speak, for I did not know what to do; but stood staring about as if I expected next to see the little darling come running up again unhurt.

"'Try there,' says the sergeant.

"Then he turned on his light in a dark corner, where the bits of wood lay, and I darted across and threw back two or three pieces, when I gave a cry, and

Digitized by Google

fell on my knees again. For there was no mistake this time: I had uncovered a little foot, and there was the white sock all blood-stained; and I felt a great sob rise from my breast as I stooped down and kissed the little red spot.

"'Steady,' said the sergeant; and then quickly, as I knelt there, they reached over me, and lifted piece after piece away, till there, in the grey light of the morning, I was looking upon the little motionless figure, lying there with her golden hair, as I had fancied, dabbled in blood from a cut in her little white forehead, where the blood had run, but now lay hard and dry. Covered with blood and scraps of mortar, she lay stretched out there, and I felt as if my heart would break to see the little, peaceful face almost with a smile upon it; while, as if out of respect to my feelings, the men all drew back, till I knelt there alone.

"And now far up in the sky the warm light of the rising sun shone, and it was reflected down upon that tiny face, and as I knelt there in the still silence of that early morn I could hear again and again a half-stifled sob from those looking on.

"With trembling hands I leaned forward and gently raised her head; then, passing one beneath her, I rose on my knee to bear her out, when I stopped as if turned to stone, then left go, and clasped both my raw and bleeding hands to my blackened forehead, as shrieking out—'My God, she's alive!' I fell back insensible; for those little blue eyes had opened at my touch, and a voice, whispered the one word—

"'Father!'

"That's her, sir. Fine girl she's grown, ain't she?

Digitized by Google

But she was beautiful as a child. Hair ever so many shades lighter; and, unless you went close up, you couldn't see the mark of that cut, though it was some time before the scar gave over looking red.

"But really, you know, sir, there ought to be something done about these bilers; for the rate at which they're a-bustin's fearful."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII.

MY PATIENT THE CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN GREENING as he was called was a curious old patient of mine whom I had to attend pretty regularly when I lived at Basingstoke. His title of captain was derived from the fact that he had in his younger days been captain of a barge plying along the canal. His was a chronic case that was incurable, so I rarely called upon him at a busy time, for nothing pleased the old fellow better than buttonholing me for a long talk.

"Look ye here, doctor," he'd say, "I like you, and it's a pleasure to be ill that it is, so as to have you to talk to."

I believe that any good return would have done as well but I did not say so, and we remained the best of friends.

I called upon him one day at his cottage where he very comfortably enjoyed the snug winter of his days, and found him so excited over a newspaper that he

Digitized by Google

forgot all about his asthma, and could only answer my questions with others.

"Have you seen about this Regent's Park accident"? he exclaimed.

"Yes," I replied, "I read it all yesterday morning. Terrible affair."

"Awful, only it might have been so much worse. There sit down, doctor. You know I used to have a canal boat—monkey boat we called 'em, because they are so long and thin."

"Yes, I know it," I said.

"Ah, and I've had a load of powder scores o' times both in monkey boats and lighters on the Thames. You ain't in a hurry to-day, doctor?"

"Not particularly," I said.

"That's good," said the old fellow. "Asthma's better. Look here, doctor, I might have been blown up just as those poor chaps was at any time, and I nearly was once."

"What, blown up by powder!"

"To be sure I was. Look here, I take my long clay pipe off the table—so; I pulls the lead tobacco box towards me—so; I fills my pipe-bowl—so; and then I pulls open this neat little box, made like somebody's first idea of a chest of drawers, takes out one of these little splints of wood, rubs it on the table, no good—on the floor, no good—on the sole of my boot, no good; but when I gives it a snap on the side of a box—fizz, there's a bright little light, the wood burns, and I am holding it to the bowl of my pipe, drawing in the smoke and puffing it out again, looking at you pleasantly through the thin blue cloud, and—how are you?

"Times is altered since I was a lad, I can tell you.

Digitized by Google

Why, as you know, that there match wouldn't light not nowhere but on the box, so as to be safe and keep children from playing with 'em and burning themselves, or people treading on 'em and setting fire to places; and what I've got to say is this, that it's a precious great convenience—so long as you've got the box with you—and a strange sight different to what it was when I was a boy.

"Now I'll just tell you how it was then, whether you know or whether you don't know. Lor' bless you, I've seen my old aunt do it lots o' times. There used to be a round, flat tin box, not quite so big as the top of your hat; and the lid on it used to be made into a candlestick, with a socket to hold a dip. Then into this box they used to stuff a lot of old cotton rag, and set light to it—burn it till it was all black, and the little sparkles was all a-running about in it, same as you've seen 'em chasing one another in a bit o' burnt paper. Down upon it would come a piece o' flat tin and smother all the sparkles out, 'cos no air could get to 'em; and then they'd put on the lid, and there was your tinder box full o' tinder.

"Next, you know, you used to have a piece o' soft iron, curled round at each end, so as you took hold on it, and held it like a knuckle-duster; and also you had a bit o' common flint, such as you might pick up in any road as wasn't paved with granite; and, lastly, you had a bundle—not a box, mind, but a bundle—of matches, and them was thin splints o' wood, like pipe lights, pointed at the ends same's wood palings, and dipped in brimstone. Them's what the poor people used to sell about the streets, you know—a dozen of 'em spread out and tied like a lady's fan—in them days,

Digitized by Google

and made 'em theirselves, they did. A piece o' even splitting wood and a penn'orth o' brimstone was a stock in trade then, on which many a poor creetur lived—helped by a bit o' begging.

"Say, then, you wanted a light—mind, you know, those was the days when the sojers used to carry the musket they called Brown Bess, as went off with a flint and steel, long before the percushin cap times—well, say you wanted a light, you laid your match ready, took your tinder box off the chimneypiece, opened it, took the bit o' flint in one hand and the steel or iron in the other, and at it you went—nick, nick, nick, nick, nick, with the sparks flying like fun, till one of 'em dropped on your black tinder, and seemed to lie there like a tiny star. You were in luck's way if you did that at the end of five minutes; and then you made yourself into a pair o' human bellows, and blew away at that spark, till it began to glow and get bigger, when you held to it one of the brimstone matches, and that began to melt and burn blue, and flamed up; when the chances was as the stifling stuff got up your nose, and down your throat, and you choked, and sneezed, and puffed the match out, and had to begin all over again.

"Well, that's a long rigmarole about old ways of getting a light; but I mention it because we'd got one o' them set-outs on board, and that's the way we used to work. You know, after that came little bottles in which you dipped a match, and lit it that way—in fosseros, I think you call it. Next came what was a reg'lar wonder to people then—lucifers, which in them days was flat-headed matches, which you put between a piece of doubled-up stuff, like a little book cover, and pulled 'em out smart. Soon after, some one brought

Digitized by Google

out them as you rubbed on the bottoms of the box on sand-paper, and they called them congreves; but by degrees that name dropped out, and we got back to lucifers for name, and now folks never says nothing but matches.

"In the days I'm telling you about, I was capen of a lighter—a big, broad, flat barge, working on the Thames; not one of your narrow monkey boats as run on the canals, though it was the blowing up of the *Tilbury* the other day as put me in mind of what I'm going to tell you in my long-winded, roundabout fashion. But I s'pose you ain't in no hurry, so let me go on in my own way.

"You see, your genuine lighterman ain't a lively sort of a chap, the natur' of his *pro*fession won't let him be; for he's always doing things in a quiet, slow, easy-going fashion. Say he's in the river: well, he tides up and he tides down, going as slow as you like, and only giving a sweep now and then with a long oar, to keep the barge's head right, and stay her from coming broadside on to the piers o' the bridges.

"Well, that's slow work, says you; and so it is. And it ain't no better when your bargeman gets into a canal, for then he's only towed by a horse as ain't picked out acause he's a lovely Arab as gallops fifty mile an hour—one and a half or two's about his cut, and that ain't lively. As for your new-fangled doing-with your steam tugs, a-puffing, and a-blowing, and as smoking, like foul chimneys on a foggy day, what I got to say about them is as it's disgustin', and didn't ought to be allowed. Just look at 'em on the river now, a-drawing half-a-dozen barges full o'coal at once, and stirring up the river right to the bottom! Ah! there

Digitized by Google

warn't not no such doings when I was young, and a good job too.

"Well, as I was going to tell you, I was capen of the *Betsy*—as fine a lighter as you'd ha' found on the river in them days, and I'd got two hands aboard with me. There was Billy Jinks—Gimlet we used to call him, because he squinted so. I never did see a fellow as could squint like Billy could. He'd got a werry good pair o' eyes, on'y they was odd uns and didn't fit. They didn't belong to him, you know, and was evidently put in his head in a hurry when he were made, and he couldn't do nothing with 'em. Them eyes of his used to do just whatever they liked, and rolled and twissened about in a way as you never did see; and I've often thought since as it was them eyes o' Billy's as made him take to drink—and drink he could, like a fish.

"T'other chap was Bob Solly—Toeboy they used to call him on the river, acause of his lame foot and the thick sole he used to wear to make one leg same length as t'other; and perhaps, after all, it was Bob's toe as made him such a drinking chap, and not the example as Gimlet set him. Anyhow, that there don't matter; only when I'm a-telling a thing I likes to be exact, as one used to be with the inwoices o' the goods one had to deliver up or down the river.

"Well, I was going up and down the river with all sorts o' goods, from ships, and wharves, and places—sundry things, you know, for I never had no dealings with coals—and one day, down the river, we loaded up with barrels off a wharf down by Tilbury—not the Tilbury as was blowed up the other day, 'cause that was only a monkey boat, but Tilbury down the river,

Digitized by Google

you know; where there's the fort, and soldiers, and magazines, and all them sort o' things.

"Loaded up we were, and the little barrels all lying snug, and covered up with tarpaulins, and us a-waiting for the tide to come—for we was going up to Dumphie's Wharf, up there at Isleworth—when Bob Solly comes up to me, and he says, says he—

"'Guv'nor,' he says, 'we ain't got no taties.'

"'Well, Bob,' I says, 'then hadn't you better get some?'

"'Yes,' he says, 'I will.'

"And then Gimlet, who had been standing by, he says—

"'And we ain't got no herrins.'

"The long and the short on it was that them two chaps goes ashore to buy some herrins and some taties, so as we could cook 'em aboard in the cabin, where we bargees reg'lar kind o' lived, you know.

"I ought to ha' knowed better; but I'd got an old *Weekly Dispatch*, as was the big paper in them days, and I was a-spelling it over about the corrynation o' King George the Fourth, and the jolly row there'd been up by Westminster Abbey when Queen Carryline went up to the doors and said as she wanted to be crowned too. I might ha' knowed what ud follow, but I was so wrapped up in that there old noosepaper, not being a fast reader, that I never thought about it; and consequently, when it was about low tide, and time for us to go, them two chaps was nowhere.

"'Seen anything o' my mates?' I hollers to a chap ashore, for I was now out in the stream.

"'They're up at the Blue Posties,' he says. 'Shall I fetch 'em?'

Digitized by Google

"'Yes, and be hanged to 'em!' I says; and I goes down to the cabin, vexed like, gets hold o' the flint and steel and my pipe, and was going to fill it, when I remembered what we took aboard, and I put 'em all back in the cupboard.

"Quarter of an hour arter, just as the tide was beginning to turn, them two chaps comes aboard, reg'lar tossicated, not to say drunk, and werry wild I was, and made 'em go down into the cabin, thinking as they'd sleep it off; and then, casting loose, I put out one of the sweeps, and we began to float gently up the river.

"I got on very comfortably that afternoon, never fouling any of the ships lying in the Pool, getting well under London Bridge, and old Blackfriars with its covered-in seats like small domes of St. Paul's cut in half, and so on and under Westminster Bridge, which was very much like the one at Blackfriars, and on and on, till the tide was at its height, when I let go the anchor, and went to look at them two chaps; when, instead of being all right, I found as the money as ought to have bought herrins and taties had gone in a bottle of stuff which one of 'em had smuggled in under his jacket, and they was wuss than ever.

"Of course I was precious wild; but as it's waste o' words to talk to men in that state, I saved it up for them, went forward, and rolled myself up in my jacket, pulled a bit o' tarpaulin over me, wished for a pipe, and then began to think.

"Now, I suppose that I got thinking too hard, as I sat there looking at the lights, blinking here and there ashore, as the tide ran hissing down by the sides of the barge; for after a time I got too tired to think, and I

Digitized by Google

OLD WESTMINSTER BRIDGE.

Digitized by Google

must have gone off fast asleep, for I got dreaming of all sorts of horrible things through being in an uncomfortable position, and among others—I suppose all on account of twenty ton of gunpowder I had on board—I dreamed as it had blown up, and I was in our little boat, rowing about on the river amongst burnt wood and bits of barge and powder barrels, picking up the pieces of myself.

"Yes, rowing about and picking up the pieces of myself; because, I said to myself, I ought to be buried decently, and not be left to go floating about up and down with the tide. I had a hard job, I remember—now fishing up a foot, now a leg, and now pieces of my body. How it was I never seemed to ask myself, that I could be rowing about and fishing myself up; but there it was, and I got quite cross at last because my head gave me so much trouble: for every time I reached at it with one of the oars it bobbed under water, and came up again, and rolled over and over, and seemed to laugh at and wink at me, till, in a passion, I gave it a heavy tap with the oar, and it went under again, and came up on the other side of the boat, bobbing up and down like a big apple.

"'Now what's the good of making a fool of yourself?' I says. 'Why don't you come in the boat along with the rest of the pieces?'

"Then it opened its mouth, and says out loud—

"'I'm as thirsty as a fish.'

"Now, the idea of that head of mine being thirsty, when it was swallowing water out there in the river, so tickled me that I began to laugh, and that laughing woke me, all of a cold shiver, to find it very dark, and these words seeming still to be buzzing in my ears—

Digitized by Google

"'I'm as thirsty as a fish.'

"What followed seems to me now just like some horrible nightmare; for as I sat there, in the forepart of the boat, I could just make out Bob Solly and Gimlet bending over a little keg, evidently as drunk as owls; and I saw in a flash that they'd been busy with an augur, and bored a hole in it, thinking it was spirit of some kind, when it was fine grain powder.

"What did I do? Nothing; but come all over of a cold sweat, the big drops ran down my face, and I felt as if I couldn't move. I knew well enough what they'd done—they'd pulled up the tarpaulin, and dragged out a cask, and were going as they thought to drink; and as I saw them struggle along towards the cabin, I thought of my dream, and felt that the barge would be blown to pieces.

"I wanted to jump overboard, and swim for my life; and even then I remember smiling, and wondering whether I should go in a boat and pick myself up. Then I tried to go after them, to shout, to do something; but the bones seemed to have been taken out of my body, and for the first time in my life I knew what it was to be in a horrible state of fear.

"That went, though, at last, and I stood up shivering and made for the side. I looked at our distance from shore—about fifty yards—and kicked off my boots. I raised my hands, and in another moment I should have plunged overboard, when something seemed to say to me 'You coward!' and I stopped short.

"Of course: I was capen, and if I deserted the barge up she must go, and Lord help the poor people ashore.

"But if I stayed?

Digitized by Google

"Well, I might save 'em.

"I ran aft along the side of the barge, feeling sure that it was all a dream, for the men were out of sight; but when I reached the cabin hatchway I heard words as chilled me right through.

"'It's awful queer, Bob,' Gimlet hiccupped; 'the stuff's running out all over my hands, and yet it ain't wet, and it tastes salt.'

"'We'll soon see what it's made on, lad,' says Gimlet, thickly; and then I had the old nightmare feeling come over me, and couldn't stir—couldn't speak, only listen, with the thought of twenty ton of powder aboard and there, with the loose powder running all over them, was my mate Gimlet busy with tinder-box, flint, and steel.

"Nick—nick—nick—nick!

"And I couldn't move.

"Nick—nick—nick—nick!

"I tried to get down the hatchway, but hadn't a muscle that would work.

"Nick—nick—nick—nick!

"There was a stoppage—a faint glow, as of a man blowing the tinder, and I became myself again, and mad with fear, I crawled through the trap.

"Then there was the sputtering and blue burning of a brimstone match; and I saw the faces of the two men quite plain.

"The splint blazed up.

"'We'll soon see what it's like now,' said Gimlet, thickly. "And he lowered the burning match, and in that one moment I saw the barrel at one side of the cabin, and the powder that had run out of the hole they had bored running about over the white floor

Digitized by Google

zig-zag, like a black snake, and making a reg'lar train.

"At that same moment a burnt piece fell from the burning match, the train fired and began to run over the floor, and I threw myself between it and the barrel flat on the planks.

"I can't tell you how it was, only that some one uttered a horrible yell, there was the sharp flash and hiss of the powder, my face was scorched as I lay flat, and the place was full of smoke and as dark as pitch.

"It seemed to be an hour, it may only have been a few seconds, when I heard them two rush up on the little deck; then there were two heavy splashes, and I knew that they were swimming ashore and I was alone.

"I daren't move, for the powder cask was touching me, and, for aught I knew, there might be scores of sparks on my clothes. And so I lay there, expecting my dream to come true each moment, till I could bear it no more, for a giddy feeling came over me, and I suppose I fainted.

"When I came to, the smoke had cleared away, but, all the same, I daren't move for long enough; and at last, when my sense—what was left—told me that if there had been any danger it would have been over before now, I roused myself and edged a little away. I felt ready to faint again; but by degrees I got away, went on deck and threw my coat into the river, looked myself all over, and then, fighting hard against the wish to jump over and swim ashore, I forced myself to the hatchway, looked down to see all black there as pitch, and then I knelt down on that bit of a deck and said the first prayer to God as I'd said for years.

Digitized by Google

"At daylight next morning I went below again; and I could see how we were saved; for my throwing myself down had driven the light dust two ways, and what with that and my body, the train when fired had not gone within two feet of the barrel.

"It was a horrible shock, though; and I didn't get over it for years. I used to dream night after night about trying to get that bobbing head of mine into the boat, and then I used to cry out and fancy I saw the flash; but I got over it in time, and seldom had the horrible dream any more. But I had it the night after the *Tilbury* went, for I thought a good deal that day about my lucky escape, and that upset me more than it did Toeboy and Gimlet, for they went ashore that night, and next day were tossicated as ever.

"It's dangerous work, though, with that powder; and, speaking as an old man, I say thank God I'm out of the trade."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII.

MY PATIENT THE QUARRYMAN.

I HAD a very pleasant visit once to Cornwall where a resident practitioner who was an old friend asked me to come down and take his practice for a couple of months.

This I did, and thoroughly enjoyed Cornwall and the common people with their sing-song, intonation, and genuine honest simple ways. During my leisure, I used to fish for mackerel and a dozen other wholesome fish that, freshly cooked, were delicious at the table. Then I had many a pleasant boating trip along the coast, the last being in company with a very intelligent workman whom I had had to attend for a bad bruise on one arm, caused by the falling over against it of a huge block of granite in the yard of the works where he was employed.

Ezra Hanson was never tired of showing me the interesting bits of the rugged shore if he could get me out with him for guide, and whenever I had time, nothing pleased me better than placing myself in his care either for a scramble amongst the rocks, picking up specimens, or out in a boat skirting the shore.

Digitized by Google

I was out with him one day in the neighbourhood of the Lizard when he gave me a very interesting account of an accident that befel him, and I give it here nearly in his own words.

"We were out in a little boat rising and falling upon the heaving tide under the shadow of the mighty cliffs that bound the shore, looking awfully forbidding to a ship on a stormy night when the sea is covered with foam; and as I sat almost-awe stricken at the grandeur of the scene, and the beauty of the sky reflections in the water, he began to run on picturing all he could to me in the most vivid way, as he illustrated it so to speak by pointing out the locality as it lay before me dotted with lichen and the sea birds that made their homes upon the shelves of the massive racks.

"'Look sir,' he said, pointing as we landed, 'see what a change there is in the colour. Now we come to the serpentine. That last black jagged rock you learned people call trap or basalt, sir; and this, that we come to now, serpentine. We have it here in great variety as to colour; but mostly it is of a deep blood-red, or a dark green, with white veins of steatite or soapstone running through it. That yonder's the quarry where I work. And now I'll show you the spot where I fell from; and when we get on to that point which runs out towards those rocks—there, where the water is all silvery foam—I can show you again the mouth of the cave; for it's almost underneath our feet now; while here—you see this chink, just as if the rock had been split at some time—you could lower yourself down through it, and get into the cave; but I never yet saw a man bold enough to do it. I came up it, and that was enough for me. Now, listen at the

Digitized by Google

roaring of the sea as it runs up the cave. It's all dark below there, or you might see the water rushing, and bubbling, and foaming in. Perhaps you're strong-nerved, and can stand it—I can't. It makes me shudder.

"Five years ago I came down here as foreman, for we were busy at that time quarrying this serpentine rock for ornamental masonry; and my duty then was to investigate a bit here and there along the face of the rock for good veins of the stone. What we want, you see, are richly-marked, showy pieces that will cut and polish well; some being firm and good, but when quarried out not having the requisite qualities for our work. Many a time I've been all along the face of this precipice, climbing from ledge to ledge, holding on to a rope fastened round my waist, and chipping the rock here and there. Now I'd swing ever so far to reach a vein, then I'd be lowered down, then drawn up; for I always took care to have three stout and true men up above at the end of the rope; while, for further security, they'd drive a strong pin into the rock round which to twist the rope

"Fine veins I've marked down, too, at different times; and, from being used to the work, our men will go on chipping and working away as coolly as can be when the waves come thundering in, and then, striking the face of the rock, fly up in a storm of spray, while the noise is deafening. Of course they can't do that when the wind reaches them; but when sheltered they'll take no more notice of the waves than if they were so much smooth grass just beneath them, instead of perhaps a hundred feet below.

"Now, lie down here, and crawl just up to the edge

Digitized by Google

and look over. There, that's a fine sight, isn't it? There's no fear, for you can't fall, even if you turn giddy. Now, you might drop a plumb-line from here right into those silvery breakers just beneath us, and the length of that line would be two hundred and thirty feet. Fine sight this, isn't it? There's the Lizard, with its lights; there to the left's Black's Head; and in front of you, rock after rock fighting against the long rolling waves that never cease their attacks, but as one is broken and falls back into the ocean in hundreds of little waterfalls, another comes tearing in to try and wear down the rock. When the sea is very calm, even from this height you may look down into the beautiful clear water and see the rocks beneath, covered in places where they are sheltered by richly-coloured sea-weeds. But now watch carefully where I drop this big piece of rock. There's a ledge down there, about a hundred feet above the sea—a spot where I stood twice: the first time by daylight, with a rope round my body; the second time by moonlight, and without the rope. Now watch, and when the stone strikes it will be on the shelf I mean; for I think I can hit the spot, though, looking down, one ledge is so confused with the other that I don't think I could point it out so that you could understand. Mind, too, when the stone splits up into pieces, and you will see the birds fly out in all directions.

"There, I thought I could do it. That's the ledge, and there they go, gulls and shag; but they don't mind; and after screaming like that for a few minutes, and having a circle round, they'll settle down again as if they had not been disturbed.

"Well, that was the ledge I stood on one day, after

Digitized by Google

slowly clambering down, with a rope round me, in search of a good, well-marked vein. Now, as a matter of course, we should not have set men to work there, for it was too awkward a spot; but after swinging here, pulling there, and gradually making my way along the face of the cliff, I saw that ledge overhanging the mouth of the cave; and shouting to the men above to hold on tightly, I felt so strong a desire to stand there, that I went on and on—now ascending a little way, now scrambling down. Twice I was about to give it up; but after breathing a bit I had another try, for I had a regular climbing fit upon me. And at last there I stood; and then sat with my legs dangling over the precipice till I felt rested; and then, half-drawn, half-climbing, I made my way up. Then thoroughly satisfied that we should do no good in that direction, I went back to my lodgings, with the intention of exploring somewhere else the next day.

"I went to bed very tired that night, and well recollect lying down; but my next sensation was that of cold, and a deep roaring noise seemed ringing in my ears. I tried to think of what it could be, for I was too sleepy to feel startled; and, stretching out my hands, they fell upon the cold, bare rock. I was thoroughly awake the next moment, though I could not believe it; and I closed and opened my eyes again and again, because it all seemed so utterly impossible. I felt that I must be asleep, and that this was a vivid dream—the consequence of the excitement and exertion of the previous day. So convinced was I that it was a dream, that I began to wonder to myself how long it would last; while ever came, as it were, right beneath me, that deep, heavy, rolling roar of the waves. as they

Digitized by Google

tumbled in over the rocks, dashed into the caves, and then poured out again.

"At last I slowly opened my eyes, battling all the while with my thoughts to make them take the direction I wanted. But all in vain; for as I looked there was the moon shining full upon me; the cool night breeze was blowing; and right below me, just as we are looking upon them now, only five times as rough, were the foam-topped waves rushing and beating in.

"I tried again to think that it was a dream; but a cold shiver ran through me—a shudder of fear and dread—and there I was digging my nails into the crevices of the rock, whose grey moss crumbled under my fingers; while, with a horrible dread seeming to turn me into stone itself, I drew up my legs, and cowered close to the rock, ready even to seize anything with my teeth if it would have made me more secure.

"That fit of horrible fear only lasted a few minutes, and then I seemed to recover my nerve; and, standing up, I began to wonder how I had come there, and to try and recall the ledges I had climbed along the day before. I had recognized the shelf again, from its peculiar shape, and the steep rock at the end which stopped further travelling in one direction; while for a moment I fancied that a trick had been played me, and that I had been lowered down by a rope. Under the influence of that thought, I shouted two or three times; but my voice seemed lost, and the cold chill of fear began to creep over me again, so that I felt that if I wished to save my life I must fight for it. So, thoroughly awakened to my danger, and now feeling that from the excitement of what I had gone through I must

Digitized by Google

have climbed down in my sleep, I cheered myself on with the idea that if I could climb down I could climb up again; and then I cautiously made my way to the end of the ledge, when a thought struck me, and I again sat down.

"Was it possible that I had climbed up?

"That wanted a little thinking out; and shivering there in my shirt and trousers, with my bare feet bleeding, and making the rock feel slippery, I sat on thinking; while the more I thought, the more possible it seemed that I had climbed up from the ledge of rock that ran along to the cave beneath.

"Trifling as this may seem, it acted as a stimulant to me; for I could see pretty clearly in the moonlight, and it struck me that every foot I lowered myself would make my position less perilous, while if I climbed up the distance would be still greater to fall. Not a thing to study much in such great heights, where a fall of one or two hundred feet can make but little difference to the unfortunate; but it cheered me then, and, rousing up, I began to look where I had better begin.

"The ledge beneath me, as I looked down, did not seem far—for, as you can see, these cliffs appear to be built up of great regular courses of stone; and I began to let myself down over the side—first my legs; then I was hanging over to my chest; then, with my fingers only clinging to the rough rock, I was resting with my toes upon a point; but feeling my hands giving way, I lowered myself yet more and more, still feeling about with my feet, which could now find no rest.

"As I looked down, the distance had only seemed a few feet; but the moonlight was deceptive, and I found

Digitized by Google

that the next ledge was beyond my reach. I could not look down to see if I could drop, and it was only by an effort that I kept the cold chill of fear from seizing upon me again. A moment's thought reassured me; and dangerous as it seemed right up there, on the face of such a precipice, I closed my eyes and dropped.

"Then, all trembling as I was, I laughed; for I had only dropped a few inches, and it was upon a broader ledge than before; and without stopping to rest, I searched along for another place to lower myself, and soon found it; when, thoroughly desperate from my position—half drunk, you may say, with excitement—I climbed along here, down there, now with loose stones slipping from beneath me, now nearly falling, but always making my way lower and lower, till I was quite half-way down, when I stopped, regularly beaten, upon a ledge down to which I had slipped. There was the silvered water below me; the black face of the rock overhanging me; and on either side rugged masses that would give me no hold either to climb up, down, or sidewise. To lower myself was impossible, for the rock sloped away; to my left there was a large split, while it seemed perfectly hopeless to try and climb again, and find another way of getting down.

"However, I felt that if I stopped still I should soon turn giddy with fright, and fall, for the ledge was only a few inches wide where I stood; so, again rousing myself, I made an effort to climb up once more. You may think that it would have been wiser to have stayed where I was, in the hopes of attracting attention in the morning, and getting assistance either from one of the quarrymen or by signalling one of

Digitized by Google

the boats that would be putting out from the cave; but, as I tell you, I dared not keep still, and the only way I could keep off the horrible dread was by trying to escape, and so exerting myself to my full strength. At last seizing a projecting fragment of the rock, just within reach of my fingers as I stood, I drew myself up, and got my chin above my hands, seeking all the while for a resting-place for my feet, and at last getting my right foot upon a tiny ledge.

"I think I told you that my feet were bare and bleeding—painful, too, they were—but I could not stop to think of that in the struggle I was making for life; but all at once, as I was making an effort to get a little higher, just at the moment when I put forth my whole strength, my bloody foot slipped from the ledge, and I was hanging by my hands to the rough piece of rock, my body swinging to and fro, my nails being torn from their roots, while what I fancied then was the death-sweat stood upon my face, and seemed to be trickling among the roots of my hair.

"As a young man I was always active, strong, and full of vigour, ready to join in any athletic sports; proud, too, of my muscles, and the feats I could perform. But in those seconds—drawn out, as it were, into hours—what a poor, frail, weak mortal I felt! The strength upon which I had so much prided myself seemed, as it were, nothing; and the brawny arms, whose corded muscles I had been so fond of rolling up my shirt sleeves to display, I felt were getting weaker and weaker every moment; while beneath me, in an ever increasing, angry roar, I could hear the waves, as if exulting and longing for their prey.

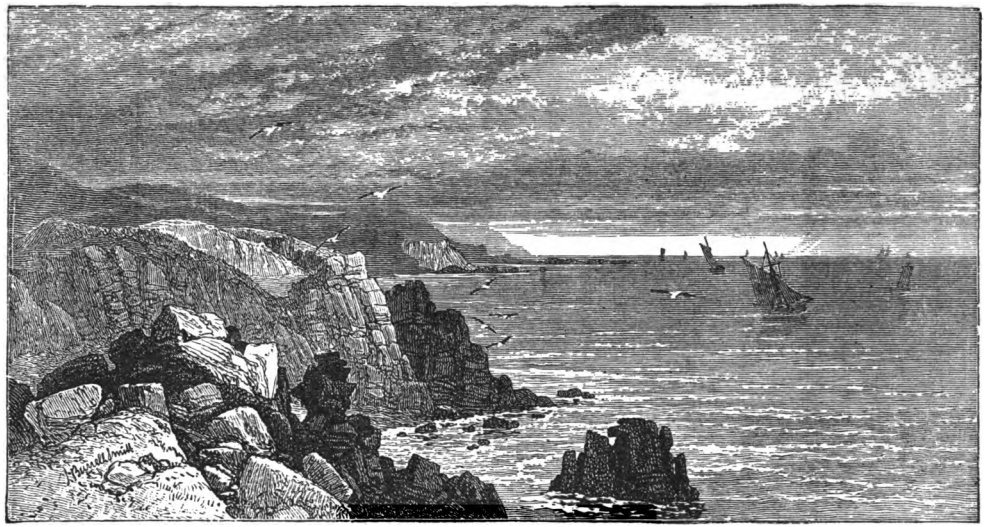
"As an earnest man, perhaps I should have prayed

Digitized by Google

then; but what control have we in great peril over our thoughts? I think I once exclaimed, 'God help me!' and then my brain was one wild state of confusion; whilst the great difficulty seemed to me to realize that I was going to die—to fall headlong into the sea. But even in my horror I could picture how the water would fly sparkling up in the moonlight; while falling from such a height I should be killed by striking upon one of the rocks just beneath — all below me being a mass of foam. Now, I thought, how long would my arms bear the weight of my body, and why had I not practised them more to such exertion? Then, rousing myself once more, I made an effort, and tried to find a resting-place for my feet. Could I have reached the ledge on which I had been standing, I would have given years of my life; and then a sort of feeling of contempt for myself came upon me, as I thought I was trying to bargain with Death by offering him a few years of my unworthy life in exchange for the whole. But to reach the ledge I found was impossible, since I had leaped sideways from it to gain the piece of rock I hung by, while every effort made me weaker and weaker. I should have shouted, but my mouth and throat were dry. A horrible pain seized the back of my neck, and I could feel my eyes strained, and as if starting. Once I thought I would loose my hold and end my misery; but I was clinging for life, and I held on.

"It could only have been for a minute or two, but the time seemed endless; while the thoughts flashed through my mind in a wild confusion, faster and faster, as I felt my muscles giving way. At last I felt that I must fall, for my arms would bear the dead weight no

Digitized by Google



VIEW ON THE COAST of CORNWALL.

Digitized by Google

longer; so, in a last despairing effort, I drew myself up, found for an instant a resting-place for my feet, then one knee was up by my hands, and the next instant I should have been lying panting upon a shelf; but the effort was made too late, and I believe a wild cry tore from my throat as I lost my hold, and could feel the air whistling by my ears as I fell down, down, what seemed an endless distance.

"Then came the cold plunge in the water—down into darkness, with the waves thundering in my ears, and the strangling water gushing into my nose. I could not think; but nature seemed to be prompting me to struggle on for my life, and, as I rose uninjured to the surface, I struck out feebly to reach the rocks.

"It was a wonder that I was not killed, for all along beneath us the shore is sown, as it were, with rocks of all sizes, covered at high water; but I fell in a deep part—there I think it must have been, where I throw this stone. Seems a long time falling, don't it? Now, there, where you see the splash, and that's just in front of the cave, that runs further in than we've ever found a man to penetrate as yet—for it's always got water for a floor, and a boat can only go in for about thirty yards when it grows narrow, and any one would have to swim as I did that night, swimming on and on as the tide bore me, and that was right into the black mouth of the cave, while I was too weak to struggle against it—all I could do being to keep afloat.

"Now I was floating in; then, as the waves receded, I was drawn back, shivering and shuddering, as I felt the long brown slimy strands of the seaweed twining about my body like some horrible sea monster. Now I tried to hold by the rocky wall; but it was slippery,

Digitized by Google

and glided by my fingers. But the cold shock of the water had done something to renew my energy, and instead of growing more helpless, I found that I could swim with more vigour after a few seconds; and once, as I floated over it, I managed to get a resting-place upon a smooth piece of rock about a foot under water. But the next minute it was three feet from the surface, as a wave came rolling in with the rising tide; and I was lifted off and borne many yards farther into the darkness of the cave.

"The moonlight penetrated for some distance; but beyond that all looked black and horrible, except where now and then I could see a wave break over a rock, and then there was a flash of light, and the water sparkled with the pale phosphorescent light—foul water, as the fishermen here call it. It was a horrible-looking place for an unnerved man to swim into; but in my weak state I dare not try to face the rough water at the mouth; so, as every wave came and bore me farther in, I swam on into the darkness, with the fear upon me that some dreadful monster would lace its arms round me and drag me under. More than once I shrieked out, for the seaweeds were thick here, and my feet were entangled; but I swam on, till after many trials I found a piece of rock upon which I could climb, and sit with the water washing round me and nearly bearing me off.

"And now I drooped, helpless and miserable; my remaining strength seemed to go away, and I hung down my head, and cried like a child. But that fit went off, and rousing up a little I looked about me; but only to see the moonlit, beautifully solemn mouth of the cave, with the silvery water rushing in. It

Digitized by Google

looked beautiful and solemn to me, even then; while the hollow, deep, echoing, musical roar of the waves at the mouth, and in the lulls, the strange tinkling, mournful splash of the water dripping from the roof, farther in, where it was all dark, sounded dreadful to me.

"But the tide was rising, and I soon found that I must leave the rock I was on, and swim or wade farther in; while now the horrible thought came—would the tide fill the cavern, and should I be drowned at last? The thought was so horrible, that I was very nearly jumping off and trying to swim to the mouth, where, in my weak state, I must have lost my life; for a strong man could not battle with the waves as the tide rises. I had often heard tell of this 'Hugo,' as they call it here, but no one had ever explored it that I know of; for it is only in the calmest of weather that a boat could come near. However, I sat still for a few more moments, trying to pierce the darkness, and find a resting-place higher up. I dared not lower myself into the water again, for thought after thought kept coming of the strange sea creatures that might make the cave their home; but my indecision was put an end to by a heavy wave that came rolling in, and I was lifted from my seat and borne in again for some distance, and dashed against a stone, to whose slimy sides I clung as the water rushed back. Then I tried to find the bottom with my feet, but all in vain; and striking out, I swam on farther and farther into the darkness, helped on by a wave now and then, and clinging to some projection to keep from being sucked back—for once down again in the water, the dread seemed to some extent to leave me.

Digitized by Google

"On reaching a rock that I could climb upon, to my great joy I found that I could get beyond the reach of the water; but I had to feel my way, for by a bend of the cave I could now see no moonlit mouth, only a shining reflection upon one of the wet walls of the place; while all around me was a horrible black darkness, made ten times more dreadful by the strange echoing wash and drip of the water in the far recesses.

"Perhaps a bolder man would have felt his nerves creep, as it were, sitting, dripping and trembling, upon a slimy piece of stone in that dreadful darkness, conjuring up horrors of a kind that at more calm moments he could not describe; but knowing all the while, by merely stretching out a foot now and then, that the tide was rising higher and higher to sweep him off. Now my feet were under water, then my knees, and soon it rose so high that at every ninth wave—"the death wave," as we call it down here on the coast—I could feel myself lifted a little; and at last, just as it was before, I was swept off, and swimming again in the darkness to find another rock on which I could creep. More than once I touched something, with hand or foot, and snatched it shudderingly back; while at such times the waves bore me backwards and forwards as they ebbed and flowed. As far as I could tell, the bottom was quite beyond my reach, for I let down my feet again and again. But the cave grew much narrower; for now I struck my head against one side, and then against the other, as I laboriously swam along farther and farther, as it were, into the depths of the earth, till once more I came against a part of the rock which I could climb up—this time, by feeling carefully about, till I struck my head against the roof;

Digitized by Google

and then crouched once more shiveringly down, waiting in a half-dazed, swoon-like state for the next time when I should have to make a struggle for life. I felt dull and listless, my senses seemed to be numbed, and it was almost in a dream that I half sat, half lay upon the wet rock, listening to the wash of the waves, and the dull roar echoing from the cave mouth; while close by me there seemed to be strange whispering sounds mingling with the dripping from the roof, which fell always with a little melodious plash.

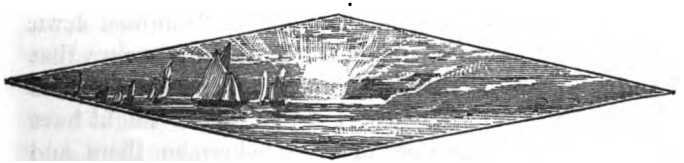
"Sometimes I seemed to doze—a sort of stupor-like sleep from exhaustion—and then I started with a cry, expecting that I was hanging once more to the rock outside, or being swept away by a wave from the rock upon which I was resting; and at last, far in as I was, there came what to me was like hope of life—for at first very faint and pale, but by degrees stronger, the light of day came down into the thick blackness of that awful hole, cutting it like arrows, and striking upon the waters before it became broken and spread around.

"As far as I could see, it came down from the roof eight or ten yards from where I sat, but it was a long time before I could summon courage to lower myself into the water, and swim along till I came beneath the bright rays, when I found that they beamed through a rift in the roof some ten feet above me; though, as I again drew myself out of the water on to the rugged side, and then clambered into the rough, long rift, I was so stiff and weak that every movement made me groan with pain.

"Now, come here again to where the rift is, and you can look down, and listen to the roar and bubbling of

Digitized by Google

the water. A strange, wild place, but I made my way up to light and life once more; though I have never found any man here yet with courage to go down, while how much farther the hole penetrates into the bowels of the earth no one knows. There are plenty of such caves along the coast here, made by the water gradually eating out a soft vein of stone from one that is harder; while as to my leaving my bed like that, and climbing to where I had been the day before, it must have been from over-excitement, I suppose. But there, such cases are common, and as a boy I often walked in my sleep, and went by night to places where I could not have gone had I been awake."



Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV.

MY PATIENTS THE FISHERMEN.

I DREAMED about that cave night after night, and it was a long time before I could get its weird echoes out of my mind. I had only to go down to the shore and listen to the wash of the waves to have my mason friend's narrative come back in full force, till I felt quite a morbid pleasure in listening to the fancied beating and echoing of the tide in the hollow place.

I used to meet a good many of the fishermen down about the little pier, and after a little bit of a case that I managed with one poor fellow who had been for years leading a weary existence, I found that I might have commanded the services of every fisherman there and had their boats at pleasure. There was always a pleasant smile for me when I went down, and whenever a boat came in if I was seen upon the pier there was sure to be a rough sunburnt face looking into mine as a great string of fish was offered to me.

"They're fresh as daisies, doctor," the giver would

Digitized by Google

say: a man, perhaps, that I had hardly seen before, while the slightest hint at payment was looked upon as an offence.

"And there's no knowing, doctor," said one man who presented me with a delicious hake, "I may be down at any time and want your help and advice. Did'nt you cure Sam Treporta? Lookye here doctor, don't you go away again, you stop and practice down here. We'll be ill as often as we can, and you shan't never want for a bit of fish so long as the weather keeps fine."

It was one afternoon down on the little rugged granite pier that I heard the story of Tom Trecarn and the bailiffs, and being rather a peculiar adventure I give it as it was told to me.

"'Is that you, Tom?'

"'Iss, my son,' replied Tom, a great swarthy, black-whiskered, fierce-looking, copper-coloured Cornish giant, in tarry canvas trousers, and a blue worsted guernsey shirt—a tremendous fellow in his way—but with a heart as soft and tender as that of his wife, whom he had just addressed in the popular fashion of his part as 'my son.' Tom had just come home from mackerel fishing off the Scilly Isles. The take had only been poor, for the wind had been unfavourable; but the few hundred fish his lugger had brought in were sold, and with a few hake in his hand for private consumption, Tom Trecarn had come home for a good night's rest.

"'Oh, Tom,' burst out his wife, throwing down that popular wind instrument without which upon a grand scale no fisherman's granite cottage is complete—'Oh, Tom,' said Mrs. Trecarn, throwing down the bellows,

Digitized by Google

there known as the 'Cornish organ'—'Oh, Tom, you're a ruined man.'

"'Not yet, my son,' replied Tom, stoically; 'but if things don't mend, fishing won't be worth the salt for a score of pilchards.'

"'But Dan Pengelly's broken, Tom,' sobbed Mrs. Trecarn.

"'Then we'll get him mended, my son,' said Tom, kissing her.

"'How many fish had ye?' sang a voice outside the cottage, in the peculiar pleasant intonation common amongst the Cornish peasantry.

"'Thousand an' half,' sang back Tom to the inquiring neighbour.

"'Where did you shoot, lad?' sang the voice again.

"'West of Scilly, Eddard. Bad times: wind heavy, and there's four boats' fish.'

"'Pengelly's got the bailiffs in, Thomas,' sang the neighbour, now thrusting his head in at the door.

"'Sorry for him,' sang Tom, preparing for a wash.

"'And I'm sorry for you, Thomas,' sang the neighbour.

"'What for?' said Tom, stoically.

"'Why, aint all your craft in his store, Tom?' inquired the neighbour.

"'Oh, yes—every net,' sobbed Mrs. Trecarn; 'and we're ruined. Eighty-four pounds fifteen and sevenpence, too, those nets cost.'

"'But 't aint nothing to us,' said Tom, turning a different colour, as an ordinary man would have turned pale.

"'Why, your craft's seized too, lad; and ye'll lose it

Digitized by Google

all,' cried the neighbour, singing it right into the great fellow's ear.

"Down went the pitcher of water upon the stone floor in a wreck of potsherds and splash, and crash went the staggering neighbour against the side table set out with Mrs. Trecarn's ornaments, as Tom rushed out of the house, and up the street to Daniel Pengelly's store.

"Dan Pengelly's store was a well-known building in Carnlyn, being a long, low, granite-built and shale-roofed shed, where many of the fishermen warehoused their herring and pilchard nets during the mackerel season—the mackerel nets taking their turn to rest when dried, on account of the pilchards making their appearance off the shores of Mount's Bay. For, as in patriarchal days men's wealth was in flocks and herds, so here in these primitive Cornish fishing villages it is the ambition of most men to become the owner of the red-sailed, fast-tacking luggers which, from some hitherto unexplained phenomenon, sail like the boats of every other fishing station—faster than any vessel that ploughs the waves. Failing to become the owner of a boat, the next point is to be able to boast of having so many nets, many a rough-looking, hard-handed fisherman being perhaps possessor of a couple or three hundred pounds' worth, bought or bred (netted) by his wife and daughters.

"To Dan Pengelly's store went Tom Trecarn, to find there a short, fresh-coloured, pudgy man leaning against one of the doorposts, holding the long clay pipe he smoked with one hand, and rubbing his nose with the key he held in the other.

"'I want my nets out,' said Tom, coming up

Digitized by Google

furious as a bull. 'I've got eighty pound worth of craft in here as don't belong to the Pengellys.'

"'So have I,' and 'So have I,' growled a couple of the group of men lolling about and looking on in the idle way peculiar to fishermen when winds are unfavourable.

"'Can't help that,' said the man, ceasing to rub his nose, and buttoning up the key in his pocket. 'I'm in possession, and nothing can't come out of here. The goods are seized for debt.'

"'But I ain't nothing to do with Pengelly's debts,' said Tom. 'My nets ain't going to pay for what he owes. I earned my craft with the sweat of my brow, and they're only stored here like those of other lads.'

"'Iss, my son—'tis so—'tis so,' said one or two of the bystanders, nodding their heads approvingly.

"'I've got nothing to do with that,' said the man in possession; 'the goods are seized, and whatever's in Daniel Pengelly's store will be sold if he don't pay up; and that's the law.'

"'Do you mean to tell me that the law says you're to sell one man's goods to pay another man's debts?' said Tom.

"'Yes, if they're on the debtor's premises,' said the man, coolly.

"'Then I'm blest if I believe it,' cried Tom, furiously; 'and if you don't give up what belongs to me——'

"Here he strode so furiously up to the bailiff that a couple of brother-fishermen rushed in, and between them hustled Trecarn off, and back to his cottage, where the poor fellow sat down beside his weeping wife, while the two ponderous fellows who had brought him

Digitized by Google

MACKEREL FISHING.

Digitized by Google

home leaned one on either side of the door, silent and full of unspoken condolence.

"'Eighty-four pound!' groaned Tom.

"'Fifteen and sevenpence!' sobbed his wife.

"'Eight bran-new herring nets of mine,' said one of his friends.

"'And fifteen pound worth of my craft,' muttered the other.

"'And this is the law of the land, is it?' growled Tom.

"'They took Sam Kelynack's little mare same way as was grazing on Tressillian's paddock,' said friend number one; and then they all joined in a groan of sympathy.

"Now, in most places the men would have adjourned to a public-house to talk over their troubles; but here in the Cornish fishing villages a large percentage of the men are total abstainers; and Mrs. Trecarn having brewed a good cup of tea, and fried half-a-dozen split mackerel, they all sat down and made a hearty meal; while during the discussion that followed, some comfort seemed to come to the troubled spirits of the men, so that about eight o'clock that night they went arm-in-arm down the ill-paved street, singing a glee in good time, tune, and the harmony so well preserved, that a musician would have paused in wonder to find such an accomplishment amongst rough fishermen—an accomplishment as common as brass bands amongst the Lancashire and Yorkshire artisans.

"Not another drop, I thanky,' said the bailiff to one of Tom's friends, who stood by him tumbler in hand, stirring a stiff glass of grog.

Digitized by Google

"It was a fine night though it had been raining, and the water lay in pools around, one of the largest being in front of the door stone of Pengelley's store, beside which the bailiff stood; for though carefully locked up, the man felt a disinclination to leave it, and he equally disliked shutting himself inside and sleeping upon a heap of nets; so he had treated the advances made by the man who had protected him from Trecarn with pleasure, and between them they had finished one strong tumbler of rum and water, and were well on with the second.

"'Not another drop I thanky,' said the bailiff; so Nicholas Harris again broke his pledge, taking a moderate sip, and passed the glass once more to the bailiff, who took it, sipped long and well, and then sighed; while it was observable that the last draught had so paved the way for more, that he made no further objections even when the glass was filled for the third and fourth time—each time the liquor being made more potent.

At the filling of the fifth glass at eleven o'clock, when nearly the whole village was asleep, Nicholas Harris, who seemed wonderfully sober, considering, stopped and whispered to a couple of men in one of the corners behind the store; and in another half hour, the said two shadowy figures came up to find the bailiff sitting in the pool of water in front of the store, and shaking his head in a melancholy way at his companion.

"'I don't feel well,' said Harris, 'and I'm going home. P'r'aps you'll help that gentleman up to the King's Arms.'

"Neither of the new-comers spoke; but each seized the bailiff by an arm, and tried to lift him to his feet.

Digitized by Google

But he did not wish to be lifted to his feet, and sat himself down again in the wettest spot of the road, making the water fly from beneath him, while every fresh attempt to get him away was fiercely resisted.

"'Have you got it?' whispered one of the newcomers.

"'Ay, lad!' said the other, 'it's all right.'

"'Then fetch a barrow.'

"The man spoken to came back in a few minutes with a wheelbarrow, by which time the bailiff seemed in a state of hopeless collapse, and remained so when he was lifted into the barrow.

"'Don't laugh,' whispered one man, as the other held his sides, and stamped about with mirth to see his companion's efforts to get the man in position; for he could not sit down, nor lie down, nor be placed sidewise, nor cross-wise. Once he was in a sitting posture and, seizing the handles, the man started the barrow; but the bailiff slowly slid down till his head rested upon the barrow wheel, and ground against it.

"'P'r'aps you'll wheel him yourself next time,' he grumbled to his laughing companion, who stepped up, seized the collapsed bailiff round the waist and carried him in his arms as easily as a girl would a baby, till he reached the village public house, where he deposited his burden beneath a cart-shed, while the peace of that end of the village was disturbed no more until morning.

"The next day there was an application to the magistrates respecting the nets that had been stolen from Pengelly's store—nets of the value of over one hundred pounds having been removed no one knew whither, Nicholas Harris was taken to task as having been seen

Digitized by Google

with the bailiff drinking; but he swore truthfully that he had gone home directly he quitted him, and had lain in bed all the next day with a fearful headache. His nets were amongst those taken. Pengelly proved that the other nets taken were Trecarn's and Pollard's, but upon their places being searched only some old nets were found, while the men themselves had put off for sea early that morning. However upon the magistrate learning from Pengelly that every article belonging to him was safe upon his premises, he turned round and whispered for some little time to his clerk, and it was arranged that the case should be adjourned.

"That case was adjourned, and, as the sequel proved *sine die*, for no further notice was taken. Daniel Pengelly got into difficulties, and his goods were sold —Tom Trecarn purchasing some of his nets; whilst it was observable on all sides that both Tom and his friends were in excellent spirits, though that might have been owing to the large take of mackerel they brought in. As to the proceedings of that night, the morality is very questionable; but still, by way of excuse, it does seem hard that under the present state of the law, even though a man can substantially prove that goods upon a defaulter's premises are his own, he must still lose them, as many a poor fellow has found to his cost. However, the above narrative is a fact, and one's sympathies cannot fail of tending towards the annexation of the nets."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV.

MY PATIENT THE PORTER.

MY acquaintance with the engine driver led on to one with a very broad porter. He was about the stoutest and tightest looking man I ever saw to be active, and active he really was, bobbing about like a fat cork float, and doing a great deal of work with very little effort, smiling pleasantly the while.

Dick Masson was quite a philosopher in his way, but his philosophy did not let him bear his fat with patience. Like Hamlet, he used to say, metaphorically of course, "Oh, that this too solid flesh would melt," for he several times came to me to see if I could not give him something to make him thin.

"Really I can only recommend change of diet, Masson," I said.

"Why I should have thought sir," he said, staring round the surgery, "that you'd got doctor's stuff in some of them bottles as would have put me right in no time."

I had to mix him a bottle of medicine to satisfy him: but it was the change in his diet and an increase of work that recalled him somewhat.

Digitized by Google

I used to know Dick at a little station on the Far Eastern line when I was staying in the neighbourhood, and on leaving there I lost sight of him for five years, when one day in London I happened upon a cab driven by an exceedingly stout man, and to my utter astonishment I found that it was my old friend Dick.

"Why Masson," I exclaimed, "is that you?"

"Yes, doctor," he said with an unctuous chuckle, "half as much again of me now as there used to be. I were obliged to put up portering and take to something easier. This life suits me exactly. It's hard on the horse, certainly, but I was obliged to take to something lighter."

"Better have kept to a porter's life, Masson," I said; "You were much lighter then."

"So I was doctor, so I was," he said, "but I were awful heavy then, and when you've got to carry somebody's trunk or portemanty, and your precious heavy self too, it's more than a man can stand."

"Yes, sir," said Dick to me one day in conversation, for he begged for my address, and came and asked for a prescription just to ease off a little of the taut, as he called it; "yes sir," he said, "I'm a working man though I do drive a cab. One o' them strange individuals that everybody's been going into fits about lately as to what they should do with us and for us, and a deal—a great deal more, how to legislate us and represent us. We don't want legislating an' representing. I tell you what we want, sir—we want letting alone. Some people runs away with the idea that your working man's a sort of native furrin wild animal that wants keepers and bars an' all sorts to keep him in order—that he's something different to your swell that

Digitized by Google

holds up a 'sumtive umbrelly at me when he wants a keb, and tells me, 'Aw—to—aw, dwive to the Gweat Westawn or Chawing Cwoss.' Well, and p'r'aps they're right to some extent; for your working man, sir, is a different sort of thing. Supposing we take your human being, sir, as a precious stone; well, set down your working man as the rough pebble, whilst your swell's the thing cut and polished.

"Fine thing that cutting and polishing, makes the stone shine and twinkle and glitter like anything; but I have heard say that it takes a little off the vally of the original stone; while, if it's badly cut, it's old gooseberry. Now, you know, sir, I have seen cases where I've said to myself, 'That stone's badly cut, Dick;' and at other times I've set down a fare at a club or private house, or what not, and I've been ready to ask myself what he was ever made for. Ornament, p'r'aps. Well, it might be for that; but, same time, it seems hardly likely that Natur' had time to make things without their having any use. You may say flowers are only ornamental, but I don't quite see that sir; for it always seemed to me as the smallest thing that grew had its purpose, beginning with the little things, and then going on right up to the big things, till you get to horses, whose proper use is, of course, to draw kebs.

"I've been most everything in my day, sir, before I took to kebs, but of all lines of life there isn't one where you get so much knowledge of life, or see so much, as you do on a box; while of all places in the world, there's no place like London. I've never been out of it lately, not further than 'Ampton Court, or Ascot, or Epsom—stop; yes, I did once have eight hours at

Digitized by Google

the sea-side with the missis, and enough too. What's the good of going all they miles when you can smell the sea air any morning early on London Bridge, if the tide's coming in; or, easier still, at any stall where they sell mussels or oysters?

"Talk about furrin abroad, give me London. Why, where else d'yer see such dirt—friendly dirt? Sticks to you, and won't leave go. Where else is there such a breed of boys as ours, though they do always want cutting down behind? Where such pleecemen, though they are so precious fond of interfering, and can't let a man stand five minutes without moving him on? No, sir, London's the place for me, even if it does pour down rain, and plash up mud, till you tie a red cotton soaker round the brims of your hat to keep the rain water from trickling through and down your neck, for you see, it's soft enough for anything.

"London's the place, sir, for me; better than being a porter at Gravelwick though you mightn't think it.

"Gentleman in uniform in those days. Short corduroy jacket, trousis, and weskit; red patch on the collar with F. E. R., in white letters, on it, and a cap with the same letters in brass on the front. Sort of combination of the useful and ornamental, I were, in those days.

"Nice life, porter's, down at a small station with a level crossing. Lively, too, opening gates, and shetting on 'em; trimming lamps, lightin' 'em, and then going up a hiron ladder to the top of a pole to stick 'em up for signals, with blue and red spectacles to put before their bulls' eyes, so that they could see the trains a-coming, and tell the driver in the distance whether it was all right.

Digitized by Google

"Day-time I used to help do that, too, by standing up like a himage holding a flag till the train fizzed by; for it wasn't often as one stopped there. Sitting on a cab's lonely on a wet day; but talk about a lonely life —porter's at a little station's 'nough to give you the horrors. I should have tried to commit sooicide myself, as others did, if it hadn't been for my taters.

"Yes—my taters. I had leave to garden a bit of the slope of the cutting, and it used to be my aim to grow bigger taters than Jem Tattley, at Slowcombe, twenty mile down the line; and we used to send the fruit backwards and forrards by one of the guards to compare 'em. I beat him reg'lar, though, every year, 'cause I watered mine more in the dry times; and proud I was of it. Ah, it's a werry elewating kind o' pursuit, is growing taters; and kep' up my spirits often when I used to get low in the dark, soft, autumn times, and get afraid of being cut up by one of the fast trains.

"Terribly dangerous they are to a man at a little station, for he gets so used to the noise that he don't notice them coming, and then— There, it would be nasty to tell you what comes to a pore porter who is not on the look-out.

"I had a fair lot to do, but not enough; and my brightest days used to be when, after sitting drowsing there on a barrow, some gent would come by a stopping train—fishing p'r'aps, and want his traps carried to the inn, two miles off; or down to the river, when our young station-master would let me off, and I stopped with the gent fishing.

"Sometimes I give out the tickets — when they were wanted; but a deal of my time was take up

Digitized by Google

watching the big daisies growing on the gravelly bank, along with the yaller ragwort; or counting how many poppies there was, or watching the birds chirping in the furze-bushes. I got to be wonderful good friends with the birds.

"We had a siding there for goods; but, save a little corn now and then, and one truck of coals belonging to an agent, there was nothing much there. There was no call for anything, for there would have been no station there only that, when the line was made, the big gent as owned the land all about wouldn't give way about the line going through his property unless the company agreed to make a station, and arrange that he could stop fast trains by signal whenever he wanted to go up to London, or come down, or to have his friends; for, of course, he wouldn't go by the penny-a-miler parliamentary that used to crawl down and stop at Gravelwick.

"We had a very cheerful time of it in the early days there afore you know'd the place, me and the station-masters—young fellows they used to be—half-fledged, and I saw out six of them; for they used only to be down there for a short time before they got a change. I used to long to be promoted, and tried two or three times; but they wouldn't hear of it; and the smooth travelling inspector who used to come down would humbug me by telling me that I was too vallerble a servant to the company to be changed, for I acted as a sort of ballast to the young station-masters.

"This being the case, I got thinking I ought to get better pay, and I told him so; and he said I was right, and promised to report the case; but whether he did so or didn't, and, if he did, whether he made

Digitized by Google

a loud enough report, I don't know; 'tall events, I never got no rise, but had eighteen shillings a week when I went on the line, and eighteen shillings a week when I came off, five years after.

"Me and the station-master used to chum it, the station being so lonesome. When the young chaps used first to come down, they used to come the big bug, and keep me at a distance, and expect me to say "sir." Bu, lor' bless you, that soon went off, and they used to get me to come and sit with them, to keep off the horrors—for we used to get 'em bad down there—and then we'd play dominoes, or draughts, or cribbage, when we didn't smoke.

"It was a awful lonesome place, and somehow people got to know it, and they'd come from miles away to Gravelwick.

"'What for?' says you.

"There, you'd never guess, so I'll tell you — to commit suicide.

"It was too bad on 'em, because it made the place horrible. I wasn't afraid of ghosts; but after having one or two fellows come and put themselves before the fast trains, and having inquests on 'em, for the life of you you couldn't help fancying all sorts of horrors on the dark nights.

"Why, that made several of our young station-masters go. One of 'em applied to be removed, and because they didn't move him he ran off—threw up his place, he did—but I had to stay.

"Things got so bad at last that the station-master and me used to look at every passenger as alighted at our station suspicious like if he was a stranger; and we found out several this way, bless you; and if we

Digitized by Google

couldn't persuade 'em to go away to some other station to do what they wanted, or contrive to bring 'em to a better turn of mind, we used to lock 'em up in the lamp-room and telegraph to Tenderby for a policeman to fetch 'em away.

"Oh, it was fine games, I can tell you, only it used to give you the creeps; for some of these parties used to be wild and mad, though others was only melancholy and stupid.

"Some on 'em was humbugs—chaps in love, and that sorter way—as never meant to do it, only to make a fuss and be saved, so as their young ladies could hear as they meant to die for their sake, and so on; but others was in real earnest; for the fact of one doing it there seemed like a 'traction to 'em, and they'd come for miles and miles right away from London.

"It was a lively time being at a sooicidal station; and though the station-masters and I kept the strictest of look-outs, we got done more'n once; for a fellow would get out right smart, go off, and then, artful-like, dodge back to the line a mile or so away, and the fust we'd hear of it would be from an engine-driver who had gone over him.

"Well, it happens one day that I was alone at the station, when a quiet, gentlemanly sort of a fellow gets out, smiles, asks me some questions about the place, and chats pleasantly for a bit, says he means to have a 'tanical ramble—as he calls it—and finishes off by giving me arf-crown.

"Now, if I'd been as wide-awake as I should have been, I might have known as there was a screw loose. What should a strange gent give me arf a crown for if there wasn't? But, bless you, clever and cunning as I

Digitized by Google

thought myself, I was that innercent that I pockets the coin, grins to myself, and took no further notice till, about arf an hour after, I happens to look along the up line, when I turns sick as could be; for I sees my gentleman walking between the rails, and the up express just within a few minutes of being due.

"Even then he'd so thrown me off my guard that I never thought no wrong, only that he was looking on the railway banks for rhodum siduses, and plants of that kind.

"So I shouts to him—

"'Get off that 'ere!' and waves my hands.

"But he takes no notice; and then, all at once, just as the wind brought the sound of the coming express, if he didn't go down flat, and lay his neck right on the off up-rail, ready for the engine-wheels to cut it off.

"It was like pouring cold water down my back, but I was man enough to act; and, running as hard as I could, I got up to where he lay—about three hundred yards from the station.

"I makes no more ado, but seizes his legs, and tries to drag him away; but he'd got tight hold of the rail with both hands—for it was where the ballast was clear away from it, to let the rain run off—and I couldn't move him; 'sides which, he began to kick at me fierce, roaring at me to get away.

"Finding as I couldn't move him, and the train coming nearer, and being afraid that I should get in danger myself if I got struggling with him, I thought I'd try persuasion.

"'What are you going to do?' I says.

"'Tired of life—tired of life—tired of life,' he kept on saying, in a curious, despairing way.

Digitized by Google

"'Get up—get up.'

"For the train was coming on. I could hear it roaring in the distance; and I knew it would spin round the curve into sight, and then dash along the straight to where we were.

"'Go away,' he cried, hoarsely; 'tired of life.'

"'There was another fellow cut all to pieces there,' I says, to frighten him.

"'I know—I know,' he said; 'three hundred yards north of the station.'

"He must have read that in a noosepaper, and saved it up, you know.

"What to do I couldn't tell. I wasn't able to move him, for he clung to the rails as if he grew there, and the train was coming.

"All I could see to do was to run on and try to stop it; but that wouldn't have done, for the engine would have been over the poor wretch before the breaks would have acted; and at last, with the roar coming on I stood there in the six foot, and I says, savage like—

"'It's too bad; see what a mess you'll make.'

"'What?" he says, lifting up his head, and staring at me a horribly stiff, hard look, as of one half dead.

"'See what a mess you'll make,' I says, 'and I shall have to clean it up.'

"'Mess?' he says, raising himself, and kneeling there in the six-foot on the ballast.

"'Yes, mess,' I says,—'tatters, rags of clothes, and something so horrid all over the line, that it's enough to make a strong man sick.'

"'I never thought of that,' he says, putting his hands to his head.

"And as he did so there was a shriek, a rush, a

Digitized by Google

great wind, which sent the dust and sticks flying, and the express thundered by, with that poor chap staring hard.

"As it passed, he looked at it with a sort of shudder.

"'You don't know what a mess it makes,' I said, as he got slowly up.

"'No,' he says, in a curious way—'no, I never thought of that.' And he began to brush the dirt and dust off his clothes. 'But I thought it would not hurt.'

"'Not you, perhaps,' I said, trying to keep his attention; 'but how about me?'

"'Yes, yes,' he muttered, 'I never thought of that.'

"He stooped down, touched the rail with his finger, looked at it, shuddered, and then looked up the line.

"'I tell you it's horrid,' I said; 'and it's cowardly of a fellow to come here for that. Now, then, you'd best come on to the station.'

"'Yes,' he said again, 'I never thought of that.' And he let me brush him down, and followed me like a lamb to the station, where, unbeknown to him, I telegraphed to the town, and a constable came and took him by the next train, with all the spirit regularly took out of him by my words.

"I'd about forgotten that poor chap till about six months after, when he came down by the stopping train, and shook hands with me, and gave me a five pound note.

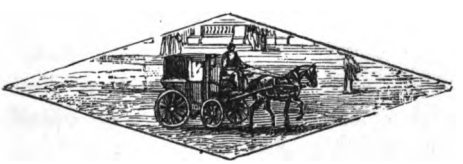
"I was afraid he was going to try it on again, but no, bless you. He thanked me with tears in his eyes, for saving his life, telling me he was half mad at the

Digitized by Google

time, and determined—something pulling him like—to end his life. He had felt no fear, and was glad the train was coming, when my words sounded so queer and strange to him that they seemed, as he said, to take all the romance out of the thing, and show it to him in, to use his words, 'its filthy, contemptible, cowardly shape. If men could see,' he said, 'they would never commit such an act.'

"I saw him off again in the train, and was very glad when he was gone.

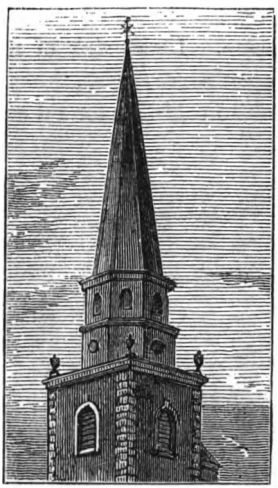
"That affair about settled me. I was sick of it; and as soon as I could—close upon a year arter, though—I came up to London and took to cabbing, for I'd had quite enough of our old station."



Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI.

MY PATIENT THE CARPENTER.



"BRING him in," I said; and four stout fellows carried the insensible figure of a well built young man into the surgery and laid him on the couch.

"How was this?" I exclaimed. "There, shut the door, we don't want a crowd in here."

"It was Harry Linney got teasing him, sir, and betting him he couldn't climb up the outside of the church tower."

"And he climbed up and fell, eh?" I said, going on with my examination.

"Yes; that's it," said one of the men, staring.

"How stupid!" I exclaimed. "Men like you to be always like a pack of boys."

"Is he killed, doctor?" said another in awestruck tones.

"Killed? no;" I replied, "but he has broken his left arm, and yes—no—yes—his collar-bone as well."

Digitized by Google

"Poor old chap," said a chorus of sympathising voices, and after bandaging and splinting the injuries I sent the man home.

He was too healthy and active a man to be ill long, and he rapidly improved, and in the course of my attendance I used to smile to myself and wonder whether Darwin was not right about our descent from the monkeys; for certainly the climbing propensity was very strong in Fred Fincher, who used to laugh when I talked to him about the folly of men to climb.

"Well, I dunno, sir," he said, "climbing's very useful sometimes. I'm a carpenter, and I have to climb a good deal about housetops in my trade, and nobody says it's foolish then."

"That's a necessity," I replied. "Yours was only a bit of foolish bravado."

"Well, suppose it was, doctor," he said smiling. "Anyhow I was not killed. It was nothing like getting up to oil the weathercock after all."

"Oil what weathercock?" I said.

"Our weathercock, sir."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean at the old place, sir. You see this is how it was:—

"We'd got a weathercock a-top of our church spire at High Beechy; and it was a cock in real earnest, just like the great Dorking in Farmer Granger's yard; only the one on the spire was gilt, and shone in the sun quite beautiful.

"There was another difference, though. Farmer Granger's Dorking used to crow in the morn, and sometimes on a moonlight night; but the gilt one a-top of the steeple, after going on swinging round

Digitized by Google

and round, to show quietly which way the wind blew, took it into its head to stick fast in calm weather, while in a rough wind—oh, lor' a' mercy! the way it would screech and groan was enough to alarm the neighbourhood, and alarm the neighbourhood it did.

"I wouldn't believe as it was the weathercock at first, but quite took to old Mother Bonnett's notion as it was signs of the times, and a kind of warning to High Beechy of something terrible to come to pass.

"But there, when you stood and saw it turning slowly round in the broad daylight, and heard it squeal, why, you couldn't help yourself, but were bound to believe.

"Just about that time a chap as called himself Steeple Jack—not the real Steeple Jack, you know, but an impostor sort of fellow, who, we heard afterwards, had been going about and getting sovereigns to climb the spires, and oil the weathercocks, and do a bit of repairs, and then going off without doing anything at all—well, this fellow came to High Beechy, saw the Rector, and offered to go up, clean and scrape the weathercock, oil it and all, without scaffolding, for a five pound note.

"Parson said it was too much, and consulted churchwarden Round, who said 'ditto;' and so Steeple Jack did not get the job even when he came down to three pound, and then to a sovereign; for, bless you, we were too sharp for him at High Beechy, and suspected that all he wanted was the money, when, you know, we couldn't have made him go up, it being a risky job.

"The weathercock went on squeaking then awfully,

Digitized by Google

till one afternoon, when we were out on the green with the cricketing tackle for practice, the Rector being with us, for we were going to play Ramboro' Town next week, and the Rector was our best bowler.

"He was a thorough gentleman was our Rector, and he used to say he loved a game at cricket as much as ever, and as to making one of our eleven, he used to do that, he said, because he was then sure that no one would swear, or take more than was good for him.

"Speaking for our lot, I'm sure it made us all respect him the more; and I tell you one thing it did besides, it seemed to make him our friend to go to in all kind of trouble, and what's more, it fetched all our lot in the cricket club to church when I'm afraid if it hadn't been out of respect to the parson we should have stopped away.

"Why, I've known him on a hot evening at practice between the overs suddenly cry 'Hold hard!' with the ball in his hands, and say—

"'Tell you what, my lads, I think a glass of Tompkins's home-brewed wouldn't be amiss just now. Smith, my man, will you step across and tell them to send me a gallon?'

"Then when it was brought all cool and foaming from out of the cellar, and he took the first glass as a matter of course, he'd got a knack of saying something sensible to a man in a way as did more good than the preaching in a month of Sundays.

"'That!' he'd say, with a smack of the lips when he'd finished the cool draught, 'That's good, refreshing, invigorating, and hearty. What a pity it is some men will be such fools as to take more than is goodfor them. Come, my lads, another glass round, and then to work.'

Digitized by Google

"Why, you may laugh at me, but we all of us loved our parson, and he could turn us all this way or that way with his little finger.

"Well, we were out on the green, as I said, and the talk turned about oiling the weathercock, and about how we'd heard as Steeple Jack, as he called himself, had undertaken to do Upperthorpe steeple, as is thirty feet lower than ours, and had got the money and gone off.

"'I thought he was a rogue,' said Billy Johnson. 'He looked like it; drinking sort of fellow. Tell you what, I'm game to do it any time you like.'

"'Not you,' says Joey Rance. 'It ain't in you.'

"'Ain't it,' says Billy, tightening his belt, and then—

"'My good man,' says the Rector, 'I could'nt think of allowing it.'

"You see, ours was a splendid spire, standing altogether a hundred and seventy feet six inches high; and as it says in the old history, was a landmark and a beacon to the country for miles round. There was a square tower seventy feet high, and out of this sprang the spire, tapering up a hundred feet, and certainly one of the finest in the county.

"'Oh, I'd let him go, sir,' says Joey: 'he can climb like a squirrel.'

"'Or a tom-cat,' says another.

"'More like a monkey,' says Sam Rowley, our wicket-keeper.

"'Never mind what I can climb like,' says Billy. 'I'm game to do it; so here goes.'

"'But if you do get up,' said the Rector, 'you will want tools to take off and oil the weathercock, and you can't carry them.'

Digitized by Google

"Just then a message came from the house that the Rector was wanted, and he went away in a hurry: and no sooner had he gone than there was no end of chaff about Billy, which ended in his pulling up his belt another hole, and saying—

"'I'm going.'

"'And what are you going to do when you get up there?'

"'Nothing,' he says, 'but tie the rope up to the top of the spire, and leave it for some of you clever chaps to do the work.'

"'What rope shall you use?' I said.

"'The new well rope,' says Billy. 'It's over two hundred feet long.'

"Cricketing was set aside for that day, for Joey Rance went off and got the rope, coming back with it coiled over his arm, and throwing it down before Billy in a defiant sort of way, as much as to say—

"'There, now let's see you do it.'

"Without a word, Billy picked up the coil of rope and went in at the belfry door, to come out soon after on the top of the tower, and then, with one end of the rope made into a loop and thrown over his shoulders, he went to one edge of the eight-sided-spire and began to climb up from crocket to crocket, which were about a yard apart, and looking like so many ornamental knobs sticking out from the sides.

"We gave him a cheer as he began to go up, and then sat on the grass wondering like to see how active and clever the fellow was as he went up yard after yard climbing rapidly, and seeming as if he'd soon be at the top.

"The whole of the village turned out in a state of

Digitized by Google

excitement, and we had hard work to keep two brave fellows from going up to try at other corners of the spire.

"'He'll do it—he'll do it!' was the cry over and over again.

"And it seemed as if he would, for he went on rapidly 'till he was within some thirty feet of the top; when all of a sudden he seemed to lose his hold, and came sliding rapidly down between two rows of crockets, faster and faster, till he disappeared behind the parapet of the tower.

"We held our breath, one and all, as we saw him fall, and a cold chill of horror came upon us. It was not until he had reached the top of the tower that we roused ourselves to run to the belfry door, and began to go up the newel staircase to get to the poor fellow, whom we expected to find half-dead.

"'Hallo!' cried Billy's voice, as we got half-way up the corkscrew. 'I'm coming down.'

"'Aint you hurt, then?' cried Joey Rance.

"'No, not much,' said Billy, as we reached him by one of the loopholes in the stone wall. 'Got some skin off, and a bit bruised.'

"'Why, we thought you were half killed,' we said.

"'Not I,' he replied, gruffly; 'the rope caught over one of the crockets, and that broke my fall a bit.'

"'Going to try again?' said Joey, with a sneer.

"'No, I aint going to try again, neither,' said Billy gruffly. 'I left the rope up at the top there, thinking you were so clever you'd like to go.'

"'Oh, I could do it if I liked,' said Joey.

"'Only you daren't,' said Bill, rubbing his elbows, and putting his lips to his bleeding knuckles.

Digitized by Google

"'Daren't I?' said Joey.

"Without another word he pushed by Billy, and went on steadily up towards the top of the tower.

"'I hope he'll like it,' said Billy, chuckling. 'It aint so easy as he thinks. Let's go down. I'm a good bit shook, and want a drop of brandy.'

"Poor fellow, he looked rather white when we got down; and to our surprise on looking up, on hearing a cheer, there was Joey hard at work, with the rope over his shoulder, climbing away, the lads cheering him again and again as he climbed higher and higher, till he at last reached the great copper support of the weathercock, and then, drawing himself up a bit higher, he clung there motionless for a few minutes, and we began to think that he had lost his nerve and was afraid to move.

"But that wasn't it—he was only gathering breath; and we gave him a cheer, in which Billy Johnson heartily joined, as, up there looking as small as a crow the plucky fellow gave the weathercock a spin round, afterwards holding on by his legs, clasped round the copper support, while he took the rope from his shoulders, undid the loop, and then tied it securely to the great, strong copper rod.

"All this time he had had his straw hat on; and now, taking it off, he gave it a skim away from him; and away it went right out into space, to fall at last far from the foot of the tower.

"Joey now began to descend very slowly and carefully, as if the coming down was worse than the going up, and more than once he slipped; but he had tight hold of the rope with one hand, and that saved

Digitized by Google

him, so that he only rested, and then continued his task.

"You see, the spire sloped so that he did not hang away from it, but against the stone sides; and so we went on watching him till he was about half-way down, when he stopped to rest, and, pulling up the rope a bit as he stood with one foot on a crocket, he tied in it a big loop, slipped one leg right through, and sat in it, swinging to and fro as he held on to the rope so as to rest his legs.

"We gave him another cheer, and so did the Rector, who just then came up, when Joey waved his hand.

"As he did this, something occurred which took away my breath; for, poor fellow, he seemed to slip, and, before we could utter a cry, he turned over and hung head downwards, falling, with his leg slipping through the loop, till his foot caught; and he hung by it, fighting hard for a few moments to get back, but all in vain; and, as we watched him, his struggles got weaker, so that he did not turn himself up so far when trying to reach the loop where his ankle was caught; and at last he hung there, swinging gently to and fro, only moving his hands.

"By this time the Rector, I and two more had got to the belfry door, and we ran panting up the dark staircase till we got out upon the leads.

"'Hold on, Joey,' I shouted. 'I'm coming.'

"'Make haste,' he cried faintly, 'I'm about done.'

"By this time I was about ten feet up, and climbing as hard as I could, forgetting all the danger in the excitement; for I don't think I should have dared to go up on another occasion.

"It was very hard work, and as I climbed the wind

Digitized by Google

seemed to blow terribly; but I got up and up, panting as I did so, till at last I was clinging there with one foot resting on a crocket, wondering what I should do.

"'Look sharp, lad,' said poor Joey, "It seems as if all my blood was rushing into my head.'

"I leaned over and got hold of the rope close to his ankle, but do anything more I could not. I had all the will in the world to help the poor fellow, but it took all my strength to keep myself with one hand from falling; and as to raising my old companion, I neither had the strength nor the idea as to how it could be done.

"The only way out of the difficulty seemed to be to take out my knife and cut the rope, and then the poor fellow would be killed.

"'Come down,' cried a voice below me.

"Looking towards the leads, there was the Rector stripped to his shirt and trousers, and with a coil of rope over his shoulder—for the new well rope had proved to be long enough to let him cut off some five and thirty feet,

"'Don't leave me,' groaned Joey, who was half fainting. 'I feel as if I should fall any moment. I say, lad, this is very awful!'

"'Here's the parson coming up,' I said.

"And so it was; for he went to the row of crockets on the other side of Joey, who now hung, looking blue in the face, and with his eyes closed.

"'He must make haste—make haste,' he moaned, softly.

"I stopped, holding on, while the Rector climbed up quicker than either of us had done it, drawing himself up by his arms in a wonderful way till he was abreast

Digitized by Google

of us two—me holding on, and Joey hanging on by one foot.

"As soon as the Rector reached us, he said a few words of encouragement to Joey, who did not speak a word, and then climbing higher, tied the short rope he carried to the long rope just above the loop-knot which held Joey's ankle. Then coming down a little, he tied his rope tightly round Joey, just under the armpits.

"'That will bear you, my lad," he said. 'But catch fast hold of it with your hands, while I cut your foot free.'

"Climbing up higher once more, he pulled out his knife, opened it with his teeth, and then began to saw through the strands of the loop that held Joey's ankle, till there was a snap, a jerk, and a heavy swinging to and fro; for the poor fellow had fallen two or three feet, and was now hanging by the rope round his breast right way upwards.

"He did not make any effort for a few minutes, and as cheer after cheer came to us from below, he swung there, with us holding on for dear life.

"'Can you climb down now, Rance,' said the Rector 'if I cut you free?'

"'No, sir,' he said hoarsely, 'I've no use in my arms or legs—they're all pins and needles.'

"'Then we must lower you down,' said the Rector, calmly. And getting hold of the long piece of rope, he climbed up once more, as coolly as if he was on an apple tree in his own orchard, and saw that the knots were fast; then coming down, he passed his long rope through the one round Joey's breast, and tied it again round him.

"'Now,' he said, 'Fincher and I will hold on by

Digitized by Google

this rope, and you can let yourself slide through the other loop—one arm first, and then the other, steadily.'

"The poor fellow had hard work to do it; but the loop was loose enough to let him work it over his head, and then with the Rector striding across from the crocket at one angle to that on the other, and me holding on to the rope as well, we let him down, sliding with his back to the stone, till his feet touched the leads, when he fell down all of a heap.

"'Untie the rope,' said the Rector, 'and get him down.'

"He spoke very hoarsely, shouting to them below; and a cheer came up.

"'Now, Fincher,' said the Rector, 'we've got to get down.'

"As he spoke, he made a running noose in the rope with the end he held in his hand, let it run up to the the big noose, and pulled it tight.

"Then he made an effort to get his legs together on one angle; but the distance he had been striding was too great, and he couldn't recover himself, but swung away by his hands.

"'I can't help it, Fincher—I must go first,' he cried. And he was already sliding down the rope as he spoke; but I was so unnerved and giddy now, that I dared not look down.

"I believe I quite lost my head then for a few moments; for I was clinging there for life a hundred and twenty feet above the ground, and the wind seemed to be trying to push me from my hold.

"I was brought to myself, though, just as the landscape about me seemed to be spinning round, by feeling

Digitized by Google

the rope touch my side; and I clasped it convulsively with both hands, and then, winding my legs round it, slid rapidly down, the rope seeming to turn to fire as it passed through my hands.

"A few moments later, and I was safe on the tower leads, trying like the rest to smile at the danger we had passed through; but it was a faint sickly kind of smile and we were all very glad to get down to the green, and cared nothing for the cheers of the people.

"The rope was left hanging there, and stayed till it rotted away; but somehow before a week was out, that weathercock stopped squeaking, as if some one had been up to oil it, and, though nothing was said about it, I've always felt as sure as sure that the Rector went up by himself and did it early one morning before any one was up.

"He was cool-headed enough to do it, for he certainly saved Joe Rance's life, and I know no one in the village would have done it without bragging after. At all events, the weathercock was oiled, and as I said over and over again to Joey, 'if Parson didn't oil that weathercock, who did?'

"That all goes to prove what I say," I replied when he had finished. "You were all guilty of foolhardiness just to gratify a little vanity."

"Well, you see, doctor, no man likes for his mates to think him a coward."

"Let them think, so long as you know you are not."

"That's what Parson said," replied Fincher, "when he talked about it next day."

"Then *Parson*, as you so politely call him, was quite right."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII.

MY PATIENT THE WAREHOUSEMAN.

"I DON'T grudge a man a glass of beer or anything of the sort," I said to a patient of mine whom I was attending, and who it was said took more than was good for him; "beer is very well in its way, but I'm certain of one thing, and that is that a man is better without either beer or spirits."

"What! in moderation, doctor?" he said.

"Yes, even in moderation; men existed and were well and strong and happy, depend upon it, long before beer or mead was invented."

"Ah, doctor, I see you're a teetotaller," he said.

"Not I, my man, unless one who seldom takes wine, spirits, or beer be a teetotaller. When you get as old as I am, you will probably begin to think that it is as well to take as much care as possible of the machine in which you live. Suppose you had some clean,

Digitized by Google

pretty mechanism—your watch, say, or a musical box, you would be very careful not to injure it."

"Of course, doctor."

"Then, why take anything that is likely to destroy so wonderful a piece of work as the human body?"

"But, does drinking beer destroy the body, doctor?"

"That depends," I said. "If you have your half-pint or pint of beer for dinner and supper, I believe, honestly, you would be better without it, speaking as a doctor; but I don't believe that indulgence would keep you from living in fair health to seventy, eighty, or ninety."

"Then where's the harm, doctor."

"The harm is drinking when you don't want it, and causing in yourself an unnatural thirst or desire for strong drink that can never more be quenched. Look around among your fellow workmen, and see how many you know who must have their half-pint before going to work, and their half-pint at eleven o'clock, and at four o'clock, and after leaving off; and at last get so that their machine won't go without oiling, and they can't pass a public-house without wanting more and more."

"That's a true word, doctor."

"And what does it mean," I said; "in the more moderate cases decided dejection; unnatural features; bloated face; injured intellect and general discomfort; and in the worst cases delirium tremens, and death."

"Ah, but you are speaking of the worst cases, doctor, the regular drunkards."

"No," I said, "I was speaking of the regular drinkers, the men who rarely get drunk, for they are inured to the liquor they consume."

Digitized by Google

"I suppose you are right, doctor," he said; "Jacob Wood went regularly mad with drink."

"I don't know Jacob Wood," I said; "but you may depend upon it if he did go regularly mad, as you call it, he had drunk until his internal organs were all in a state of disease that affected the brain; and if you'll take my advice, my man——"

"You'd turn teetotaller?"

"No, I don't put so heavy a tie upon you," I replied, "you have been used to your beer; well, if you feel to want it make a stringent rule that you will never take any except with your meals; you'll be a better man in a month, and will not need to come to me."

"Pity poor old Jacob Wood didn't come to you, doctor."

"It's a pity he did not," I said. "Let me see, you are a warehouseman, are you not?"

"Yes, sir, I work up in one of the great Tooley Street warehouses, seven stories above the ground, and everywhere around me wool—bales upon bales of wool which we crane up from waggons or lighters and in at an open door, where, if a fellow had had a little drop too much and slipped——well, seven stories would be an awful fall.

"Ours is a place worth going over, sir. There's floors upon floors beneath, stored with jute and dye-woods, teas, coffees, spices, tobaccos, and lowest of all on the ground floor and in the cellarage, tallows in great hogsheads. Ah, it's a busy place, and the stores there is worth some money, and no mistake.

"I remember Jacob Wood doctor," he said, drawing in a long breath as if of pain, "and no wonder; but

Digitized by Google

it's strange, how very little people see danger when it's coming to them.

"I was at our warehouse one day, and had been down for half-a-pint, when, 'What's the matter with Jacob Wood this afternoon?' says one of the men."

"But, excepting that he looked a little wild about the eyes, I didn't see anything more about him than might often be seen in men who will drink heavily at times; and so I said. But at last, towards evening, when I was longing to get away home to spend my evening comfortably, I was left alone upon that floor with him, and felt a bit startled to see him go all at once to the open door where the crane landed the bales, and cut some strange capers, like a man going to dive off a board into the sea.

"Putting down my work, which was getting ready two or three burst bales for the hydraulic press, so that they might be tied up again, I slipped quietly up behind him, and laid my hand upon his shoulder, when, with a yell, he shrieked out.

"And the next moment, by the light of the gas on that foggy winter's afternoon, we two were wrestling and fighting together, within a few feet of the door, out of which we should have fallen clear a hundred feet upon the stones of the wharf below.

"I should have shouted, but all power of speech seemed taken away, as locked together we wrestled here and there, while his hot breath hissed against my cheek, and I could look close into his wild, glowering eyes as, flushing with rage, he bore me nearer and nearer to the doorway.

"Used as I was at all times to standing close to the edge and receiving bales and packages, I could lean

Digitized by Google

over usually without a shudder; but now, with this madman slowly forcing me back towards the certain death, I could feel the cold sweat standing upon my face, and trembled so with dread that my resistance became feebler and feebler; till as a last resource I managed to get my leg between my opponent's, and tripped him, when we fell heavily.

"Fortunately for me my enemy was undermost, and the force with which his head came against the warehouse floor partly stunned him, so that I shook myself free, and turned and fled towards the stairs. But the next moment I thought of the open doorway, and the state the poor fellow was in, so turned back to lock it, to ensure that he did not come by his death by falling out before I could get assistance.

"My hand was on the door, but I could not close it, for Wood lay in the way; and shuddering at how near he lay to the gulf, I stooped to draw him on one side, when he started up and seized me again.

"To beat up his hands, and turn, and run down between the piled-up bales didn't take long, while roaring with rage I could hear him tearing after me.

"The stairs were pretty close, but as I ran round the end of the bales I found the door closed, and had to dart past to avoid being caught; when I turned down another opening between the packages, and ran panting on.

"Big as the floor was, there was passage after passage between the wool, which was piled up eight or nine feet high, and I tore on in the hope o.. getting ahead so that I could dart through the stairs door, fasten it after me, and so escape or summon assistance. On and on I ran, now getting ahead, and now with the panting breath close to my shoulder, so that I expected

Digitized by Google

every moment to feel a savage hand laid upon me to drag me down. At last he got so near that his hand brushed me; but, with a yell of horror, I leaped forward again, dodged round a corner, ran down a short passage, and again on, past pillars and piles, when turning round I found that I was alone; and hurrying to about the centre of the narrow passage, between the high walls of wool, I leaned against the side panting and breathless.

"'Now, if I could but reach the door while he was at the other end,' I thought, 'I should be safe;' and I kept on nervously watching the two ends of the passage lest I should be taken by surprise; when, to my horror, I saw by the gas shining upon it a savage head peer round from the end nearest the way of escape, watch me for a moment, and then disappear. It was now quite dim and twilight in all the passages, and my first idea was to dart off in the opposite direction; but a little thought told me that perhaps the wretch did not see me, and therefore I had better stay where I was; and so I stood minute after minute expecting to see him come round one end or the other, and dash down upon me.

"I knew that about half-past five the watchman would come round, and then I could give the alarm; but it wanted nearly an hour of that time, and how I was to hold out till then I could not tell, for the very thought unnerved me; and, overcome with fear, I could feel my knees tremble and seem ready to give way beneath my weight.

"Five minutes passed—ten minutes—and still no sign. My spirits rose a little, and I began to hope that escape was yet possible, but abated nothing of my

Digitized by Google

watchfulness. Another five minutes, and I had almost determined upon trying to steal down towards the door, where the reflection from the gaslight made the end of the passage quite bright, while where I stood was in a fast-deepening shadow. I took two steps forward noiselessly, and then stopped; stole on again and stopped with a dead silence all around, through which I could hear the singing of the gas and the loud 'throb, throb' of my heart. I had somewhat recovered my breath, and kept slinking silently on, every now and then looking back to see that there was no pursuit. What I should have liked, and which would have been in accordance with my feelings at the moment, would have been to dash forward; but I kept down the desire, and crept slowly on between the two huge walls of wool bales piled some eight or nine feet high.

"Only another three yards, and here I stopped, trembling in dread lest Wood might be watching for me; but calling myself fool, coward, and cur, I stepped on again; and at last, with the light shining full upon me, leaned forward to peer cautiously round the edge of the bales. Slowly and quietly, nearer and nearer, till I looked round; and then, with a horrible fascination upon me, I stopped still—for, in precisely the same position, Wood was craning his neck forward to peep round at me; and with eyes looking into eyes, and only three or four inches apart, we stood what seemed minutes immovable. Move I could not, speak I could not, for my throat felt dry and hot; while my eyes, fixed and staring, looked into those glaring, wild-beast-like orbs, which seemed to hold me fixed to the earth as if some horrible nightmare was upon me. I felt that if I closed my eyes but for a moment he would spring

Digitized by Google

at me; and at last, clutching the wool firmly with one hand, I drew myself slowly back, fixing his eyes the whole while, and then, as my strength seemed to come back, I leapt round and fled down the passage once more, as I heard a hideous yell, and saw Wood dash into the entrance.

"But there was silence again directly, and looking back as I reached the middle, I could see that I was not pursued; when, fearing that with all a madman's cunning he had gone round to try and trap me at the other end, I stopped once more where I was, mentally praying for aid, as I strained eyes and ears to catch sight of or hear my enemy.

"A quarter of an hour must have passed without a sound meeting my ears, and I was hopefully calculating upon aid soon coming, when a slight rustling noise seemed to have been made close by me, and I started and looked eagerly towards the dark and then towards the light end of the narrow passage I was in.

"Nothing to be seen; and the minutes again passed slowly on, when all at once came the most horribly unearthly yell I ever heard from just above my head, and then, overcome with terror as I shrank to the floor, I looked up and knew that Wood had climbed over the top of the wool; and as the thought flashed through my mind, he bounded down upon me and had me by the throat.

"I struggled for a few moments, and then lights seemed dancing before my eyes, blood rushing to my head; and, in a half-insensible state, I have some recollection of being dragged along the floor into the gaslight, and then pulled and thrust about for a few moments, when there came the regular thud-thud

Digitized by Google

of the little pump close by, and I could feel myself moving upwards. But all seemed so calm, and such a desire for sleep was upon me, that it was not till there was a fearful sense of oppression and tightness that I awoke to the consciousness that the wretch had forced me on to the traveller of the hydraulic press, and was now forcing in the water beneath the ram, so that in a few more seconds my life would be crushed out.

"Thud-thud, thud-thud went the pump, and the pressure was awful; while at the same time, as I vainly writhed and tried to press down the heavy plate that was crushing me, I was conscious of a great light which shone around, and which I thought was caused by the flushing sensation in my eyes; but no, for directly there came the noise of shouting, louder every moment; and then I made out, ringing up from the yard, those horrid words, 'Fire! fire!' and then I knew that Wood must have fired the warehouse.

"Shouts, cries, and the noise of hurrying feet; and Wood stood in the glare of light, looking first one way and then the other, as if confused, for he had quitted the pump on the first noise of shouting. All at once he darted away; and half fainting and suffocated with the pressure, I could do nothing but groan feebly, after struggling a little, to find every effort vain; and then with sharpened senses gaze at the flames licking the roof of the floor I was on, and escaping up the sides of wool bales, and the more inflammable goods that were in the warehouse. The smoke soon became blinding and the heat stifling; and for me there seemed no hope, since I was sure no one would be able to penetrate to where I was; when again I gave a struggle, and stretched down my hand backwards to try and reach the

Digitized by Google

tap, which would let off the water and set me at liberty, or at least place me in a position to try and escape the horrible death that seemed my fate.

"But no, the handle was far out of my reach; and I groaned and wept at my helpless condition. The press held me by the chest with awful power, but my hands and arms were at liberty; while my head hanging down backwards enabled me to see the flames creeping along faster and faster, as I saw them reversed, and began to calculate how long it would be before they would reach me and end my misery.

"All at once, when nearly fainting, my hand came in contact with the iron bar used to lengthen the handle of the pump, to force in the water with more ease when greater power was required; and then my heart gave a leap as I thought I might be able to strike the handle of the tap and let out the water.

"I grasped the bar, and then I began swinging it about slowly, to try and strike the tap; but in vain, for I could do nothing with it from only being able to swing it at random, for I could not see. Nearer came the flames, louder rose the shouts; and as I looked along the warehouse I could see that all escape was cut off by the stairs, even if I had been at liberty; and now, completely overcome by the pressure and the horror of my position, I groaned heavily, and the bar fell from my grasp.

"'The last hope gone,' I thought; when at the same moment a familiar sound struck my ear, for in falling the bar had struck upon the tap, when there came the fierce gush of the compressed water, and the ram began slowly to descend till I could crawl out, to fall fainting upon the floor.

Digitized by Google

"But I was up again directly, for there was a fierce glow in the place; and now I could see Wood busily at work tearing out wool to feed the flames, and dashing everything else he could lay his hands upon into the fire, which seemed at times to singe him.

"I looked round, for he took no notice of me; and I had before seen there was no escape by the door, so, running to the open door by the crane, I caught hold of the rope, and began lowering it down as fast as possible, with the light shining full upon me, and the people below either groaning with horror or cheering me on as I tore at the stout rope, and sent the crane handle spinning round and round.

"Could I but get enough rope out before Wood's attention was taken, I felt safe, for I knew that I could slide down easily enough; but, as I dreaded, he caught sight of me, and leaving his fiery task, he rushed towards the door; when, with a yell of terror, I leaped from the flooring, clinging tightly to the rope, which began to run swiftly out as I swung to and fro till it was all out, when the jerk nearly dashed me off. But, after sliding down some little way, I recovered myself, and letting the rope glide slowly through my hands, I went lower and lower, with my eyes fixed on the blazing floor above.

"All at once I felt the rope jerked and swung about, and I could see the figure of Wood at it; and then again I was being drawn up, and I knew he must be busy at the crane handle; but the next minute he must have loosened his hold.

There was a yell from the crowd, something dark dashed by me with a rushing noise, and as I clung trembling to the rope I heard a horrible dull thud, and

Digitized by Google

slipping swiftly down the rope for the remainder of the distance, I suppose I fell fainting by the side of Wood's mutilated form.

"The fire was got under when our floor was burned out, though much damage was done by water; but with the exception of a strange, nervous timidity that I fancy I shall never get the better of, I was not much the worse."

"And was Jacob Wood killed?"

"No, sir," he said; "he fell upon some bales of wool; but he was dreadfully hurt, and never man enough to take his turn in the warehouse again, and very glad we all were."

"And yet you men rather need an example."

"Well, yes, sir, we do," he said, thoughtfully; "but I'm going to turn over a new leaf."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY PATIENT IN THE RIVER POLICE.

"DON'T you find it very dreary at night upon the river?" I said to one of my regular patients—a river policeman—who preferred my services to those of the divisional surgeon for a long bout of sciatica.

"Just like the old woman's eels, sir, and the skinning: one gets used to it. It's lonesome like of a night upwards; but there you have the lights on the bridges and there's gas here and gas there; and a faint roar comes over the housetops from out of the streets. It's when you're below bridge that it seems dull; where the big vessels are moored in the black muddy stream, that goes hurrying by them with a low, rushing noise—creeping and leaping at their slimy sides, covering their anchor chains, or the buoy to which they swing, with all sorts of muddy refuse; and sometimes of a night there'll be a body get hanging on somehow, ready for us to find and take ashore.

"'Now, if I give you a bit of tight chain going

Digitized by Google

from a ship's bows to an anchor down in the mud, on one side; and if I give you a dead body floating along on the other side, you'd think directly as there'd be no chance of the one stopping by the other—you'd think as one would float down all slimy and horrible, touch against t'other, and then rising, it would ride far enough out to sea. But, Lor' bless you, that's where you're wrong; for how it is I can't tell you, but it always seems to me, and has seemed ever since I was in the river police, that dead bodies lash and hang themselves somehow against mooring chains, on purpose that they might be found, and get a decent burial. Else how could they stop as they do, over and over again? I can't tell, nor you can't tell, nor nobody can't tell; it's a nat'ral mystery, and mysteries is things as gets over all of us.

"Since I was nearly being found myself, hitched on to a mooring chain—for I'll lay any money that if I had been bested I should have gone quite naturally all the same to where I'd seen so many before—I've got to take a little more than a business interest in such things. It's very awful, you know; and though I'm an ignorant man, it often sets me thinking on the dark nights when our galley's going slowly with the stream, floating along the black, rushing river—yes, it often sets me thinking about the state of affairs in our great city, and wondering whether all our great civilisation's so good after all, when it brings down stream to-night a decently-dressed body with the pockets inside out, and marks as of blows on the swollen face; to-morrow night a well-dressed body with no marks, and money and watch and all there; next night the body of a young woman with an oldish face, but on that

Digitized by Google

face a weary, despairing look, that seems to say there was no rest anywhere but in the river, and into the river she had come; next night, again, perhaps another well-dressed body, most likely with a bit of paper and a half washed-out address pinned inside the torn dress bosom—and this one, perhaps, would be young, and fair, and pale, and sometimes not at all horrible to look at.

"There, I've seen great, strong, rough men, used to all sorts of things, stand with their hats off by such sights, and speak in even choky voices, as if they could hardly keep back something that they would be ashamed for others to see, down by some river stairs, where the muddy tide has gone 'lap, lap,' at one, two, or three o'clock in the morning. Why, at such times I've often felt creepy myself; for people may say what they like, but you never do get used to death, and whenever you meet it you feel a strange sense of quietness stealing over you; and one of the first things generally done when we land a body is, old or young, to cover it with sheet or sack; and even then there's a horrible sort of drawing of you in it; and I've sat before now watching, and unable to get away from the uncouth covered thing, with the stream of water trickling slowly away to get back to the river.

"But, there, I think you've had enough about what goes floating down the river and floating up the the river, backwards and forwards, with the tide grinding it against wharf, and pier, and buttress, till there's no telling who or what it was. I dare say you've had enough; but it's a thing I could go on talking about for hours—beginning with me, or one of my mates, or a River Jack finding of them, and then going on,

Digitized by Google

through the giving notice, and the inquest, and all the rest of it; and it's all going on day after day, month after month, year after year. Talk of the River Jacks, though, what a singular thing it is: they never by any chance find a body with any valuables about it; but always, when they come across it, watch, money, pins, brooches, they're all gone; and when, quite serious-like, I've asked them how they can account for it, I've always got the same answer—a knowing wink of the left eye.

"Ours is a strange sort of life, and lots hardly know of our existence; but, bless you, there'd soon be some rum goings-on if our little row galleys were not always busy at work up and down the river. You take plenty of precautions on shore, don't you, where there's wealth? Well, don't you think there's as much need afloat, where there's millions of pounds' worth of stuff almost at the mercy of the thief? For though sailors are pretty good at keeping watch out at sea, get 'em in port, and watching with them means choosing the softest plank under the bulwarks, and having a good caulk. So that's where we come in useful—working along with the Custom House officers to keep down the plundering and smuggling that, but for us, would be carried on to an awful extent. For, you see, there are gangs who make it a practice to work with lightermen and with sailors; and sometimes by night, sometimes in open day—they carry off prizes that are pretty valuable.

"River pirates you may call them, though they've got half a score of cant names, and tea chests, bags of rice or sugar, kegs of spirits, rolls of tobacco, all's fish that comes to their net; and if they can't get things of

Digitized by Google

that sort, why they'll go in for bits of sails, ropes and chains, or blocks, anything even to a sheet of copper or a seaman's kit—once they get their claws into it, there's not much chance of its being seen again.

"It used to be ten times worse than it is now, and in those days there was a fellow whom I'll call River Jack, who was about the most daring and successful rascal that ever breathed. We knew his games, but we could never catch him in the fact; and at last of all I got so riled at the fault found with us, as robbery after robbery took place, that one night, after a row about a ship's bell stolen off the deck of a large Swedish corn barque, I made up my mind that I'd never let things rest till I'd caught Mr. River Jack at some one or other of his games, and had him sent out of the country.

"Now, talking was one thing and doing another, and just at that time I'd been making arrangements for putting a stop to my activity by hanging a weight round my neck. I needn't mention any names, but there was a young lady there—my wife now—that I used to go and see, and as soon as ever it came to my time for going off to duty there used to be a scene, for she got it into her head that I should be sure to meet with some terrible accident on the river; and at last, frem being rather soft after her, what with the talk and tears, I used to be in anything but a good trim for my spell.

"'There, don't be such a chicken,' I used to say, when she'd laid her little head on my shoulder, and been talking a whole lot of unreasonable nonsense; but it was of no use to talk, she would be a chicken; and one night I went away, feeling as if I had caught the

Digitized by Google

infection, for I never felt more chicken-hearted in my life.

"An hour after I was on the river, with three more, pulling very gently along in and out amongst the shadows of the great ships. But whether we were in the shadow or out, it did not make much difference, for a darker night I never saw, and one and all we came to the conclusion that if we were lucky, there must be something for us to do; for that some of River Jack's gang would be at work we were one and all sure. You see, it was just the sort of night they would like; for looking out was no use, since we could see nothing four yards ahead; all we could do was to wait in the hope that our friends might come near us—and come they did.

"We had been paddling gently about for a couple of hours, and at last had pulled under the stern of a great vessel that had come up the river that evening, but had been too late to get into dock. She was fresh over from the East Indies; and besides saltpetre, and tea, and cochineal, she had on board a large freight of odds and ends—curiosities and such-like. Of course we did not know this then; but a big vessel like she was seemed very likely to prove a bait to the river pirates, and there we lay holding on to the rudder chains.

"'I wish I was a-bed,' says Jack Murray, one of the men under me that night.

"'I wish I was over a pipe and a glass of grog,' says Tom Gray, who was another.

"And then we sat still again, knowing that we should be sure to hear of something wrong in the morning, and knowing, too, that even if there was some game

Digitized by Google

carried on within a dozen yards of us we should not hear it.

"We were in luck, though, this night, for a minute after there was a soft plash heard above the rushing of the river, something dark passed over where a miserable glim of a lamp was shining. Then there was a faint low whistle from over our heads, another from out of the black darkness where we heard the plash, and then a boat brushed close by us; there was the sound as of something being lowered down, and before you could say 'Jack Robinson' we'd grappled that boat, and the man in it; slipped on the handcuffs, and got him fast, with a bale of silk handkerchiefs in his boat; and in a few minutes we'd got a couple of the sailors as well.

"You may guess my surprise and delight when I took a look at our prisoner with a lantern, to find that it was River Jack himself; and, to make a long story short, he was convicted and sentenced to ten years' transportation.

"'But I'll be back before that, Tom Johnson,' he shouts to me as soon as he had got his sentence; 'and when I do come—look out.'

"He was hurried out of court before he could say any more; but those words somehow, for a time, sunk into my memory, and worried me a deal, till I got married, and then I forgot them.

"Well, my married life was just the same as any other man's married life, except that my wife always had such a dislike to my way of business. Twenty times over she would have had me leave it for something else; but, as I said to her, 'a bird in the hand's worth two in the bush, 'specially if the one's bread and cheese

Digitized by Google

and the other ain't.' For, you know, what was the good of me giving up the certain sure for the certain chance?

"'But I do have such horrible dreams about you,' she says.

"'Dreams never come true,' says I.

"'Oh, yes, they do,' she says. 'My aunt once dreamt that they were going to have the bailiffs in; only a month after, in they came.'

"'Well, I don't mind believing that,' says I, 'for it's a very likely thing to happen to any of us.'

"'But I'm always dreaming you're being drowned,' she says.

"'Well, then don't dream so any more," I says huffishly, for I was in a hurry to be off.

"And I ask you, just as a fair question, is it pleasant, if your duty takes you on the water all day or all night, as the case may be, to have the wife of your bosom always dreaming that you are brought home drowned?

"I got to be obstinate at last, for it was all nonsense to think of giving up a decent position on chance; so the more my wife dreamed about me being drowned, the more I came home at regular times, sound as a roach, and dry as a bone, except in wet weather. Matters went on as usual; chaps were caught stealing or smuggling, and they were imprisoned or fined; and all this time I'd forgotten about River Jack, till one evening, when, from information I'd received, I had myself rowed, as soon as it was dark, on to one of half a-score of lighters moored off the Surrey shore, and loaded with the freight they had been taking out of a full-rigged ship, just about a hundred yards ahead. For, you, see, some owners won't go to the expense of having their vessel

Digitized by Google

in dock, but have it unladen where she lies. I had had a hint or two that there was likely to be something on the way; but as it was a light night, I knew very well that if our boat lay anywhere on the watch, the consequence would be that the plundering party would never come near.

"Well, I had myself rowed there, crept on to one lighter quietly, loosened an end of a tarpaulin, got underneath, and made myself snug as possible, giving my men orders to lay off behind a brig two hundred yards away, ready to come up to my help when they heard me whistle. Then, in a moment or two, I heard the oars dip, growing fainter and fainter each moment, till all was still but the sighing of the wind, and the lapping, rushing noise of the tide running down hard.

"What an easy thing it is to plan out anything on paper, or in your own head, and what a different affair it turns out when you work it out in practice! Here was I lying snug in hiding, and all I'd got to do was to wait patiently till anybody came to plunder the lighters, then jump up, staff or pistol in hand, and arrest the lot; whistle, when our galley would come up; the men be transferred into the boat; taken to the station; and praise and promotion for me would most likely follow.

"That's how it was on paper; this is how it turned out in practice.

"I'd lain there for quite half an hour, in not the most comfortable of positions, when, growing tired, I took a glance out through a hole I slit with my knife in the tarpaulin; but all was still—nothing to be heard but the rushing of the river past the great barge, and I lay back once more, wondering whether the enemy

Digitized by Google

would come, and, if they did come, how long they would be first.

"I don't think I'm more of a coward than most men, but somehow just about then I began to wish that I had made a couple of our fellows stay with me; then I wished that it was morning; and then, as I turned cold and shivering, I began to think about that dream of my wife's; and from being cold I now grew hot and wet with perspiration, so that I was thinking of lifting the tarpaulin a little, when I stopped the idea, for I heard all at once a sharp, scratching noise.

"'Rats,' I said to myself; and I began to think of the amount of mischief the little wretches do on shipboard, getting carried out, too, in the bales to the lighters, and from them into warehouse and bonded store.

"Then came the scratching again, and a slight rustling; and I uttered a loud, sharp hiss to drive them away; for, shut up as I was, I did not much like the idea of being nibbled by rats.

"That hiss did it; for it was all that some one wanted to know. My whereabouts was nearly guessed at: that showed it exactly.

"The rats seemed to have gone, and I was peering about in the darkness, when there came another faint rustling noise, and then—*crash*—it was as though half a dozen bales of cotton had been thrown upon me. I was nearly suffocated; but I had sense enough to know that several men had thrown themselves upon the tarpaulin; that my enemies had been too much for me, and had been lying in hiding beneath the coverings when I came, and had now taken me at a disadvantage.

Digitized by Google

"The thoughts ran rapidly through my brain, and I struggled hard to get myself sufficiently at liberty to blow my whistle, when a voice that I seemed to know whispered—

"'Lie still, or we'll drive a knife through to you.'

"Struggling was, I knew, useless then; so I prepared myself for an effort when opportunity offered. But they were too much for me. As the tarpaulin was raised, three men crept under; a lot of oakum was thrust into my mouth; my whistle taken away; the handcuffs in my pocket, ready unlocked, thrust upon my own wrists; and, with many a warning growl, I was rolled off the lighter side into a boat that I had supposed to belong to one of the barges.

"'Now, Jack, you and Dick take him off,' was whispered; and I thought I caught the word 'Erith.'

"'They'll lay me in one of the reed-beds, bound hand and foot,' I thought; 'and the others will help clear this lighter the while.'

"I was so excited that I made a bit of a struggle, but only to have the end of an oar brought down heavily across my forehead; and the next moment some one leaned over me, and for a few seconds the glaring light of a bull's-eye rested upon my face.

"The next minute my blood ran cold; for there was a low laugh at my ear, and a voice I seemed to know said—

"'Every dog has its day, my lad. It's my turn now!'

"I wanted no telling—I could understand all plainly enough. River Jack had come back, and he meant to have his revenge.

"But what would he do? He would not mur——

Digitized by Google

"Pooh! nonsense! his companions would interfere. But there was only one here, and they were softly but swiftly rowing me down with the tide. If they would land me at Erith! They said so; but then this scoundrel had not known me, and now that we had openly recognized one another, he could not afford to have me as a witness to his having returned before his time.

"Was my wife's dream coming true? I shuddered from head to foot as I heard the washing of the water beneath the boat's keel; and then I thought of the bodies I had seen brought out, and the mooring chains; and then it seemed to me that I was to be as I had seen others, and a horrible sweat of terror broke out on me. But just then my attention was taken up by a low muttering between the men, and Hope whispered that one of them was opposing the other's plans. Whatever was said, though, silence followed, and they rowed on swiftly for what must have been a quarter of an hour, though to me it seemed an age, when, before I could do more than utter an inarticulate roar of despair, I was lifted quickly to the boat's gunwale, and in another moment I was beneath the cold, rushing water.

"A struggle or two brought me to the surface again, and I made an effort with my fastened hands to reach the boat; but, with brutal indifference, Jack placed the blade of his scull against my chest, and thrust me under; and when I again rose, it was out of sight of those who had thrown me in.

"Even in that time of agony, with the water burning and strangling in my nostrils, and thundering in my ears, I could think of the plunder the scoundrels would

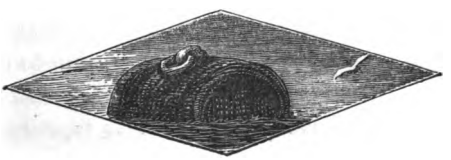
Digitized by Google

get; of how my men would stay waiting for my whistle; of my wife's dream; and lastly, of the finding of my handcuffed body, floating up and down with the tide. The papers would call it a mysterious murder, for I was sure to be found; but that River Jack would have it brought home to him was not likely.

"I could do but little; every struggle seemed to send me lower; I tried to float, but in vain; and the water whirled me round and round, drove me against vessel sides that I could not clutch, past lights that I could not hail, and I was fast lapsing into insensibility, when I struck something hard, raised my arms over it, and clung there with my nostrils above water—learning the secret of how bodies could hang to a mooring chain.

"At the end of a fortnight's fever, I learned how that I had been found soon after by another of our galleys, clinging to the mooring chain of a great vessel; but it was for some time a question of doubt whether our men had found a body with or without life.

"That's many years ago now, and such deeds have happily grown rare; though you don't know of all that goes on down the river. I'm in the force still, and mean to stay; for River Jack was taken, and report says he was shot by a sentry while attempting to escape, out in one of the penal settlements."



Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX.

MY PATIENT THE EMIGRANT.

TALKING of penal settlements naturally suggests settlements that are not penal, where our most enterprising unsuccessful men go to seek the home and prosperity that they have not been able to discover here. One such man as this was Samson Harris, who, after twenty years of Australian life, returned home with a comfortable competency for a man of his class. He was no millionaire, but he had made enough to live upon to the end of his days, and then leave enough for his children.

I attended his family, the little that they needed of medical aid, and finding him a thoroughly well-informed man, full of general knowledge, a certain amount of intimacy ensued, and he at various times told me so much of his life out at the Antipodes, that I was pretty well able to picture it from beginning to end.

He gave me one very vivid account of an incident in his career which I have endeavoured to reproduce.

Digitized by Google

From his description of his home, it might have been in one of the midland counties, the scene was so calm and peaceful. The roughly-built cottage, with its familiar English objects here and there—the loudly-ticking clock, the cleanly-scrubbed three-legged table; the big old family Bible; the cage of white wicker, with its ragged-tailed thrush hopping from perch to perch; and I picture to myself Samson Harris seated there upon a stool in the midst of the humble room, before a tin bucket of water, Englishman written boldly in the lines of his rugged, ruddy, sun-tanned face, as he bent to his task of washing out the barrel of his rifle—a necessity for protection in those early settling days—making the water play up like a fountain from the nipple, to the great delight of two rosy children who were looking on.

It might have been here, in one of the midland counties, but there was something about the brightness of the afternoon sun which streamed in at the open door, the blueness of the sky, the clearness of the atmosphere, and the scenery around, that was not English. The flowers that clustered about the door and nodded round the rough window-frame, and the objects that peeped here and there from some corner, too, told of a foreign land; while the huge pines that shot up arrow-like towards the sky were such as could be seen nowhere but in Australia.

"The poor brutes have been calling you, lass, for the last half-hour," said he, looking up as a tall, fair-haired girl entered the room where he was busy, milking-pail in hand, and stood to watch the task with as much interest as the children.

"They shan't wait any longer, father," said the

Digitized by Google

girl; and she passed slowly through the door, humming a cheery old country ditty, and was gone.

The barrel was taken from the water, and wiped out; and then Harris set to work oiling the lock.

"Hallo, what are you back for?" he exclaimed as a roughly-dressed, heavy-faced man came up to the hut-door at a trot, his forehead streaming with perspiration, which had marked its course in lighter lines through his dust-grimed face. Directly behind him came, at an easy, loping swing, a tall, thin, fleshless-looking native, whose black skin shone as he came into the hut after his companion.

"Blacks out," panted the heavy-faced man, seizing the door as if to shut it, at the same time examining the cap upon the rifle he carried—"Blacks out, master."

"Blacks out, Tom?" said Samson; "blacks out? 'Pon my word, I never saw such a coward in my life. Now what in the world were you lagged for that your conscience must make you see a nigger in his paint behind every tree, or peeping up above the scrub? Blacks! Poor, inoffensive beggars. Why, you had your rifle, hadn't you, ready to scare off a hundred? This makes six times you've run home to cry wolf. And you've left those sheep to take care of themselves." he continued, forcing the ramrod into its place as he rose as if to leave the hut.

"'Tain't wolf this time, master; 'tain't, indeed," cried the man earnestly; and then, seeing Harris's smile of incredulity, he relapsed into a look of sullen injury, and stood leaning upon his rifle-barrel.

"Here, come along," said Samson.

"Load up first, master," said Tom. "'Tis true,

Digitized by Google

THEY SHAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER, FATHER!"—(see p. 221).

Digitized by Google

indeed," he exclaimed, once more seeking to obtain credence for his story. "I saw scores. Ask Teddy here."

Now Teddy—or, as he was known in his tribe, Bidgeebidgee—stood spear in hand, showing his white teeth, and apparently listening intently, from the way in which his nostrils expanded and twitched. That something was amiss was evident, for, leaning his spear against the wall, he now took off the ragged blue shirt he wore, unfastened his girdle, and set free a formidable-looking waddy, or club, before throwing himself flat upon the ground to listen.

Samson paused, startled, and though uncharged, he involuntarily cocked his piece as Teddy, the black shepherd, leaped up and exclaimed—

"Black fellows all a-coming—one—two—ten hundred."

The next instant he threw himself into an attitude of attack, poising his spear for hurling at the first who should cross the threshold.

"Get out," exclaimed Samson, recovering himself; "here have I lived now two years and only seen a party or two of the poor wretches begging, and—

"But they burned Riley's hut, and butchered his wife and children," said Tom, earnestly.

"Don't believe it," said Samson, sturdily, "only a bugbear made up by some of them pioneering chaps to frighten new-comers from going up country and taking claims, so that they may have best choice themselves."

"Wallace's boy's head was battered in," said Tom.

"Gammon," said Samson, who, however, could not help looking uneasily towards the black.

Digitized by Google

"Then there was Ellis's poor gal; you know how they served her."

"Hold your tongue, will you?" growled Samson; "do you want to frighten the women to death?" and as he spoke he clapped his hand over his convict servant's mouth, and glanced uneasily towards the door which led into the interior of the hut—one that was unusually large, for during Samson's pleasant sojourn in this smiling wilderness, matters had prospered with him, and bit by bit he had added to his dwelling, and found himself compelled to make fresh arrangements for his flocks and ever-multiplying herds.

"Did you call?" said a pleasant voice, and then the door opened, and Samson's comely wife made her appearance.

"No," said Samson, "I didn't call, but ——"

"Here a come," said Teddy, and all present heard the rapid beat of feet, audible to the black's keen sense some time before. Tom cocked and raised his rifle; Samson snatched down a revolver from a hook over the fireplace, knocking down and breaking a little china group of the children in the wood, an ornament brought from the far-off English home.

But the next moment arms were lowered, and Teddy's spear was not thrown, for two men, whose faces were known to all present, dashed panting into the hut.

"Look out," one of them gasped, "the blacks are out."

"Now then, master!" cried Tom triumphantly.

"Don't see nothing blacker about than your face, neighbour," said Samson dryly, as he turned to one of his visitors. "Ain't neither of you killed, are you?"

Digitized by Google

The man did not answer, but turning up the sleeve of his woollen shirt to the elbow, showed a long, jagged but superficial scratch from the upper joint to the wrist, with here the blood drying fast, there still standing in beads upon the lips of the wound.

"I might have been," said the new-comer grimly, "if the fellow who threw the spear that made that long scratch had been truer in his aim. The blacks are out strong, well armed, and in their war-paint; and if you don't want them in here, Samson Harris, you'd better shut that door."

Half-grudgingly, the squatter made two steps towards the door; then he stopped for he caught sight of his wife, standing with blanched and drawn face, holding tightly her two children. She did not speak; but, as their eyes met, her lips parted to form one word which the father read in an instant. Thought after thought rushed lightning-like through his brain; all the old colonists' tales and their horrors seemed to force themselves upon him; the burning of Riley's hut, and the cruel butchery of wife and children, and the other barbarities said to have been committed; the child of a squatter named Wallace beaten to death with clubs; the death of the blooming daughter of one Ellis. A mist seemed to swim before his eyes for an instant; but the next he had shouted, "Come on, such of you as are men;" for he had again encountered the agonized face of his wife—again interpreted that one word her lips had parted to form, and he dashed to the hut-door; but only to be grasped tightly by his convict servant, Tom.

"Let me go!" he shouted, "are you mad?" and he dealt the man a heavy blow in the chest, and sent him staggering back, shouting—

Digitized by Google

"Hold him, hold him!"

"Let me go, Anderson — Jones!" cried Samson, again struggling to reach the door, but held back by the new-comers. "Are you mad, are you men, when poor Mary is out there in the scrub?"

The wounded man gave more of a yell than a cry, as Samson Harris uttered those words, and, loosing his hold of the father, he made for the door himself, but only to fall heavily, tripped up by the waddy the black shepherd had cunningly placed between his legs.

The fall was heavy; but as he went down two spears darted through the open door, and stuck quivering one in the floor, the other in the table. The next moment the door was dashed to by Teddy, and its rough wooden bar laid across.

"Better there, than through you, Master Anderson," said Tom, dragging the quivering spear out of the table, and passing it to Teddy.

The young man did not speak; but his eyes glared, and the curls of his black beard seemed to move and writhe as his features worked. Then, grasping the rifle he held in his hand, he turned to Samson Harris, saying in a husky voice—

"Are you ready?"

Samson forced a bullet down upon the powder of the rifle he was now engaged in charging, and nodded his head by way of reply.

There was no opposition made now, and as Samson and Anderson prepared to make a dash out to reach the scrub, Tom the convict, Anderson's companion, and the black made as if to accompany them.

"No," said Samson hoarsely, "stay and protect

Digitized by Google

them," and he pointed to his wife and the two astonished children. "Now open the door."

At his words, Teddy threw the door widely open, but before any one could pass through, he dashed it to again, while as he did so, Samson groaned, for, "thud—thud—thud" came the sound of three spears as they stuck in the stout woodwork, one passing right through; and he knew that had they stood in the doorway, it would have been to their death.

"Frank Anderson," said Samson in a low voice, holding out his hand, "I always set my face against your coming here, for I didn't think you were in earnest, my boy; and now—now—if it's to come to that——" and he pointed to the spears, his voice shaking a little the while, "I should like to make friends first, though I have gone on against you. Frank Anderson, I beg your pardon!"

The young man groaned, as he took the proffered hand, and then in the same low voice he whispered—

"But Mary, when did she go? Which way?"

"Heaven forgive me," exclaimed the wretched father, "and I'd forgotten her till *she* showed me my duty," and he nodded towards his trembling wife. "She took the pail and went to the cows, half—three-quarters of an hour ago."

"But we must go to her," whispered the young man.

"Then you'll have to go with your skin as full of spears as a porkypine's back, master," said Tom, who had crept closer to them. "There; hark at that!" he exclaimed, as a burst of yells arose. 'There's a good two hundred of the black devils dancing about."

Digitized by Google

"It would be madness to go," said Samson, "and like sacrificing three more lives; but she may have hid herself, and escaped."

The young man shuddered, and then raised his rifle, for a spear came crashing through the window, but happily without striking any one.

"Here," said Samson, rousing up, "lend a hand!" and with the help of those present, he half carried his wife and two children up a short ladder to a roughly-formed loft, full of wool fleeces, and formed in the low-pitched roof.

"There, creep under them," he cried, "and first pull up the ladder. Now hide yourselves there, you'll be safe for the present."

"Look out," shouted Tom, as Mrs. Harris dragged up the ladder, and its last rounds were beyond reach, while at the warning cry, Teddy the black and Anderson discharged spear and rifle at a couple of blacks who appeared at the inner door, having climbed in by one of the windows. Then ensued a sharp struggle, in which desperate blows were given on either side, and the inner room was cleared; but not before three of the savage assailants lay writhing upon the floor, their life-blood staining the white boards of the plain bed-chamber.

It was a dangerous task, and more than one spear flew through the window as the bodies were hoisted up and thrown through: then the opening was barricaded as well as those of the other little front windows of the hut, and one or two stood at each, ready to meet the next assault.

The thin blue smoke of the discharged pieces floated slowly upwards, and seemed to wreathe about over the trampled blood-stains, when a cry came from Tom

Digitized by Google

the convict, and almost at the same instant the report of his piece, summoned help to the back half-kitchen, half wash-house, whose little window was the only opening in the rear of the house.

The help was needed, for about a score of the blacks had dashed up to the opening, and were trying to force their way in; but a well kept up fire from rifle and revolver drove them back, with several of their number bleeding, upon the ground.

"It's of no use to be merciful," exclaimed Anderson. "They must be shot down, or we shall be all butchered. Take a steady aim, sir, for your wife and children's sake; but I'd keep two or three shots left in my revolver for the last."

Samson Harris turned and glared at the wild countenance of the young man by his side, as if to ask what he meant, but the look was unnoticed, for, as if thirsting for blood, Anderson kept on loading and firing whenever one of their enemies offered his body as a fair mark.

At every shot that took effect, there was a wild yelling, above which might be heard the shrieking and wailing of the gins as some famous warrior of the tribe slackened his muscles, let fall spear, waddy, shield, or boomerang, that he should hurl no more; but, in spite of their losses, the attack was kept up now on one side, now on the other, spear after spear flying through the little windows, or sticking in the bedding with which they were barricaded, to be dragged out and sent flying back by Teddy the black, who in his excitement had reduced his costume still farther, only wanting a little yellow, red, and white paint to emulate the warrior uniform of his enemies.

Digitized by Google

But at last the evening had set in, for the short twilight was past, and the stars were looking down calmly upon the scene of the afternoon's bloodshed. Though but shortly before, dusky figure after dusky figure might have been seen gliding from tree to tree, or darting across some open spot, yelling and brandishing spear or club, now all was silent, save at times the distant lowing of some of Samson's cattle or the bleating of sheep. Now and again, too, would come the barking and howling of the dogs that had been driven away by the fierce native onslaught—one of those raids made upon the settlers, whom they looked upon as usurping their land.

Samson Harris seemed utterly prostrated by his agony of soul, for again and again—almost incessantly—he kept picturing to himself the child he accused himself of neglecting, struggling in the hands of the blacks. He would have gone to seek her now, mad as the act would have been, in the darkness of the night, surrounded as they were by enemies, but for the prayers of his wife; and their only hope seemed to be that poor Mary had taken the alarm and sought for refuge in the scrub, which extended for some distance in one direction. This, he knew, would be but an act of folly if she had been seen, for they would have tracked her footsteps to the place of refuge with the greatest of ease; their prayer was that she might have taken the alarm in time. Anderson and his companion had had a very narrow escape at the station they occupied some few miles from Samson's home; but a bold front and a daring charge had enabled them to combine their forces, so, as Anderson had hoped, to be of some protection to Mary Harris, for whom he had, in spite of her father's

Digitized by Google

opposition, long entertained a warm feeling of admiration.

There was a chance that, under cover of the darkness, Mary might thread her way amongst the blacks and reach the hut; and in this hope Anderson stood at the open door watching the night through hour after hour, his senses on the stretch. More than once, too, with Teddy for companion, he walked for some little distance round the hut; but stumbling over the body of one of their enemies, he fell amongst the bushes with so loud a crash that he was glad to retreat, and stand watching once more at his post.

An inspection after the afternoon's struggle had proved that, beyond a few scratches, the defenders of the hut had escaped unharmed; and but for the fearful anxiety which oppressed all present, they would hopefully have looked for the morning, ready to meet their enemy again with renewed courage. Provisions they had in plenty to sustain them, if needs were, for weeks. Ammunition, too, showed no sign of running short, till Samson opened a little keg, to find that the powder it should have contained was powder no more, but one hard mass, into which it had been turned by the dripping from the roof. The bad news was conveyed from one to the other, and in grim silence the men examined their powder-flasks, to find that he who was most wealthy possessed but two charges beyond the one in his rifle.

"Will they attack again to-morrow?" was the oft-repeated question. One thought they would for revenge, and never rest content until all within the hut were destroyed; another was of opinion that they would be too demoralized, and that the morning light would find

Digitized by Google

them all miles away; but this last supposition was too full of hope to be believed in. Anderson and Harris rarely spoke, but while the others, fearless in the knowledge that the natives never attack by night, slept heavily, they watched on, repeating to themselves, as they pictured the solemn silence of the vast woods around, the camp of the natives, and their savage cruelties, the same words over and over again—

"Where was Mary?"

Watching the long night through, with straining eyes constantly directed at every spot that seemed never so little darker than the night itself. Bush, tree, farming implement, all in their turn were magnified into enemies, performing the same duty as the inmates of the hut, and waiting to spy out their weakness and the best place for the morrow's assault. But as the night wore on, and the watchful stars still shed their peaceful light, a change came over the wakeful ones, and objects that had before been looked upon as enemies, were taken for the figure of her whose absence had created such a void in more than one heart. But though Anderson started hopefully again and again, and roused the sleeping black by his side, there was no rustling, gliding step, no eager light form of the young girl, who, with beating heart, had threaded her way amidst her sleeping enemies, and now bounded towards the hut for shelter.

Anderson groaned, and could have torn his hair, as, disappointed, feverish, and restless, he once more walked round the hut, listening attentively for some sound where all was still in the vast region around, even to solemnity. But in vain; and could he have

Digitized by Google

done so, he might have sought in sleep that rest and refreshing his jaded body needed.

Morning at last: first, the pale pearly grey; then the far-up faint pink tinge; then the blushing, glowing clouds; then the gorgeous golden arrows darting to the zenith; and lastly, as if with a bound, came the glorious sun himself, to beam upon the earth with smiles, as though all were peace, and sorrow a thing unknown. But there was neither rest nor peace, for with a series of frantic yells the blacks again showed themselves, crying, leaping, dancing, shouting, partly to alarm their enemies, partly to work themselves up to the fighting pitch. Their faces were streaked with a kind of red ochre and pipe-clay, while upon the bark shields they carried, grotesquely-hideous human faces were depicted, to intimidate those whom they attacked. Nude, save for the opossum-skin strip knotted loosely round their loins, they once more came boldly up to their attack upon the hut, hurling spear and boomerang —that singular weapon, which, failing to strike the object aimed at, returns to the thrower's hand.

There was nothing for it, so far as the inmates were concerned, but to fire till the last bullet and grain of powder should be expended, and then trust to such weapons as they could muster for close quarters, giving up being a question never once mooted; and now, as shot after shot was fired, it was pitiful to see the effect in the bright red spot or long gash in the flesh, where a bullet had struck obliquely. But when fighting in defence of life, men have but little compunction for those who would rob them of the gift, and it was with a grim feeling of satisfaction that savage after savage was seen to fall, till a tall, daring fellow, who had

Digitized by Google

dashed up to the hut, clapped his hand to his chest, leaped in the air, and fell motionless, when Anderson threw down his rifle, saying, "That's the last charge."

A gloomy silence ensued. Men gazed from one to the other; then fixed long and anxious looks upon those who had been their leaders in the fight, as if expecting them to hit upon some plan of escape from the death that seemed imminent. Now they swept the approaches to the hut, in hopes that some strong party of settlers might be on the way to them, either bound for a new station, or, knowing that they were attacked, with a mission for their rescue. But in a place where a fresh face was not seen once in three months, they knew well that such succour was next to impossible.

Mrs. Harris, patient, and calmer than any one present, still lay with her little ones hidden in the wool-loft; but as from time to time, when she came to the edge, her eye met that of Anderson, there was a mutual reading of the agony each suffered, hidden though it was beneath the semblance of stoicism.

The stillness that had followed upon the excitement of the fight seemed at length to have grown unbearable: men felt that treachery was at work somewhere, and momentarily expected an attack from some unguarded part. They grew distrustful, and more than once Anderson caught himself going from window to window, to see that a proper watch was kept where he anticipated danger.

At length, half-maddened by the mental pain he suffered, Anderson cast himself despairingly upon the floor of the hut, turning his face from those around, that they might not see its workings.

The young man's action was not without its effect;

Digitized by Google

for his companion, the friend who had escaped with him from the blacks' assault upon the previous day, now broke the silence, saying, in utter forgetfulness of the woman and children—

"It's all over, my lads: we may as well shake hands all round, and make a rush of it, right into the black mob, as stop here and be burnt out like squirrels in a tree. I can't bear this standing still any longer."

But though he looked from face to face, no man answered him, but on the whole avoided his gaze, and watched on at the dusky figures of the savages as they moved incessantly to and fro. When, seeing that his words were of none effect, he coolly laid aside his rifle, rolled up his shirt-sleeve, and opening a large knife, began to rub and sharpen it upon the hearthstone.

The mental anxiety was frightful; for, let alone the thoughts of poor Mary's fate, it was as though death were about to descend upon the watchers from moment to moment, while they were debarred from making a single struggle for life.

The morning fled, and noon came; and still there was no further attack, and wounded figures had been seen to struggle and gradually stiffen into the rigidity of death within their sight; others to crawl by slow degrees into the shelter of the bushes, unheeded by their savage companions. But still no further attack was made, it seeming evident that the blacks were holding a consultation amongst themselves in the shelter of the trees and bushes but a short distance off.

Now a black figure would glide into sight, and look menacingly towards the hut before darting out of sight once more. Then there was a long interval before

Digitized by Google

another was seen; and then eyes were strained amongst the trees in vain for a sight of their enemies.

The heat had been excessive, and the small supply of water within the hut being exhausted, the men began to suffer terribly, what little they had having been nobly given up to Mrs. Harris and the children. All at once, though, Teddy seized a pail, and, lolling out his tongue like a thirsty dog, began to pant and to make signs that he should be let out to fetch water—signs that were quite unnecessary, for he had no difficulty in making himself understood in his master's language.

But Harris was immovable, and ordered him back. The black's fidelity had been too often tried, and Samson felt that he could not afford to risk the loss of one faithful servant at a time like this. So Teddy put down the pail upon seeing his master's mood, seized again waddy and spear, and, panting and tongue-lolling, took his place at one of the windows to watch again for his enemies.

His face was a study as he stood there watching: his eyes half closed, mouth twitching, and nostrils working. He was evidently perplexed, and more than once made a movement as if to climb out of the window; but at length his face changed into a fixed immobility, and he seemed waiting till his master should command.

Hour after hour passed by, and all was still silent. From watching, Samson took to examining the powder-keg once more. But it all seemed turned to a solid mass, till with a hatchet he knocked off hoop after hoop, cleared away the little staves, and struck the block heavily with the hatchet, to find, when the shell was broken, that within were some pounds of uninjured

Digitized by Google

powder, at the sight of whose grimy grains men's hearts rose, and rifles were loaded, and flasks eagerly filled.

In readiness once more, they waited the next attack; but the sun had long begun to descend, and for hours they had neither heard a yell nor seen a single figure gliding from amongst the trees.

"Um all gone," cried the black shepherd suddenly; "here Juno."

And in effect, frisking and playing about in front of the hut, one of Samson's dogs had made its appearance, whining and howling till it was admitted; but fearing that the blacks might still be within reach, Samson kept his companions within doors, only yielding to the appeal of Teddy that he might go out and see.

Teddy glided like a great snake out of the back window, and was soon lost to sight; but before long a horse or two, some sheep, and the cows came bleating and lowing about the hut, affording abundant proof that the savages, of whom they had a wholesome dread—fleeing rapidly at the sight of their spears—had departed.

And now began the search for Mary, all present knowing that sooner or later they must find her, living or dead; though almost all felt, as they set about their search with heavy hearts, that the wailing mother's fears were not without cause.

In case of a surprise, they all kept together, fearing to shout, but encouraging the dog to hunt around, when suddenly Anderson's rifle rose to his shoulder, and he was about to fire, but perceived just in time that the black figure rapidly approaching was that of Teddy the shepherd.

"All gone right 'way," he said, nodding his head sagaciously as he pointed out the faintly-marked trail

Digitized by Google

made by the departing savages, while he was loud in his declarations that they were "too much fright, come back never—ever." When asked what he thought about the missing girl, he only shook his head, and would not answer till pressed, when his reply was, "No know—try find;" and bending down, he began to scan every footprint in the direction she would have been likely to take, till darkness put a stop to the search, and all save Samson and Anderson returned to the hut.

No one saw the agony of those two men, as now, slowly working their way through the bushes, stumbling with utter weariness, they strode on till nature would hold out no longer, and they sank down, worn out, to sleep for an hour or two beneath the watching stars; but only to leap up, reproaching themselves for their relaxed efforts, as they went back to the hut to try and hear some tidings of the lost girl.

The haggard, drawn countenance of Samson Harris's wife saluted them as they hurried up to the door of the hut, and in that encounter, where each sought for news or hope, it was plain enough to read the bitter tidings written in each anxious face. Anderson turned away with a groan, and was proceeding towards the dense scrub, when Samson called to him to halt, as he kicked at the black shepherd to rouse him from his heavy sleep.

Ten minutes after, with Teddy leading the way, they were examining the ground, step by step, in the hope of finding the track by which Mary had entered the scrub; but the grass was so trampled in every direction that the task seemed hopeless. Footprints and trails there were lacing and interlacing, one destroying the identity of the other; but though seeking, as it were,

Digitized by Google

entirely in the dark, they pressed on hour after hour. Ever and again, either the father or Anderson shuddered when they came upon some spot where blood sullied the fair green herbage with its crimson stains; and when such a place occurred, they traced the blood-spots tremblingly, and in dread lest they should stumble in their next step upon the body of her they sought.

But no such harrowing sight met their gaze; and still to and fro they searched, shouting at intervals, till night again put a stop to their efforts.

Day after day passed of indefatigable search, and the thought occurred again and again to Samson that the blacks must have dragged the poor girl off with them in their retreat; but Teddy would not hear of it, saying, "Wait a bit—find um soon; black feller no take white girl away." Anderson, too, seemed of opinion that Mary was still near at hand, and with torn and bleeding hands and face he still kept up the weary search, till long after it was certain that if the poor girl were found in the scrub, life would be there no more.

Dense—impenetrable almost—the scrub extended mile after mile, mile after mile, to an indefinite distance, presenting ever the same features; so that if the poor girl had been alarmed by the savages and hurried for safety into the wilderness, guide there was none; and, like many another, she might toil on till she fell exhausted, to perish of inanition. To a dweller in England the idea of being lost in the bush seems absurd; but out in the great Australian wilds, where everything is on so grand—so apparently illimitable—a scale, strong and ardent men have been before now known to wander from the beaten track to where pathway there was none, and

Digitized by Google

to wander on and on till death put an end to their sufferings.

But had Mary wandered away in dread, fleeing for safety through the thorny waste? They could not answer the question; and, in spite of making an ever-widening circle to try and discover the trail, all seemed vain. Samson would have pushed off by the track taken by the savages, but for the persuasions of Anderson; and though so far disappointment had attended his efforts, Teddy seemed pleased at the trust reposed in him, and often, down upon hands and knees, he examined every blade of grass and leaf.

The traces left by the marauding party extended right round the hut, and for some distance back into the wild in every direction; and it was beyond that circle that the principal efforts of the seekers were directed; but days wore on without any success, the difficulty growing greater each hour, in a land where vegetation is rapid and grass would soon spring up where the foot had pressed, as was very apparent; for on the eighth morning, when they again started upon their apparently hopeless task, the tracks of the savages were in many places hardly to be seen. All dread of their enemies' return seemed lost in this great trouble, and they wandered on, heedless of danger, till on this last day they were at a spot many miles from home, where there was an opening in the dense scrub—the rough head of rock and huge boulder being thrust here and there through the soil to form a desolate wilderness, far as eye could reach—mile after mile of rugged stony undulation, upon which the sun beat down with a heat that was all but unbearable.

For days past Teddy had been taciturn and moody,

Digitized by Google

hunting on still, and apparently examining every inch of ground; but he hardly answered when spoken to, apparently under the impression that Samson and Anderson were disappointed in his tracking abilities, of which he was very proud, and had before now often proved to be of no mean order.

Evening was fast approaching, when it seemed to Anderson that the black had made some discovery, for he was pressing on in one particular direction, though, when shouted to, he took no heed. Tired and worn, however, sick at heart with many disappointments, father and lover sat down to rest, when at the end of about an hour they heard the well-known "cooey" of the black, reiterated again and again. So, desponding, they rose and proceeded in the direction of the sound, to meet the black at last, looking eager and yet startled—apparently afraid to communicate his intelligence to Samson—and turning in his track to retrace his steps for a couple of miles, when, just as night was falling, he halted, stepped aside, and pointed onwards to where there was a little eminence visible in front.

"For Heaven's sake push on," cried Anderson, huskily; but Samson grasped at his arm, and would have stayed him had he not thrust him aside and dashed forward, to be out of sight in a few moments amongst the bushes which here grew thickly.

Five minutes passed and he did not return, when, staggering like a drunken man, Samson followed in his steps, with eyes bent upon the ground, and brain apparently stunned, feeling that some dread horror was about to be revealed to him, but only in a numb, helpless way. The black came close behind, watching him intently, till, parting the bushes, he came in sight

Digitized by Google

of Anderson, kneeling by the figure they had so long sought; for, lying as if peacefully sleeping, beneath the scanty shadow of a stunted bush, through whose thin sharp leaves the evening breeze sighed mournfully, was the sleeping girl, whose torn garments, lacerated feet, and arm bent beneath her head, showed that she had indeed fled from the approach of the savages, and wandered on and on hopelessly till she had lain down, as she imagined, to sleep her last, long sleep. The hand which Anderson grasped was tightly clenched; but in spite of its coldness, the thin blue lips, sunken eyes, and the unnatural pallor of her face, it was evident that she lived. The father, though, knew it not, neither did Anderson; for, weeping like children, they knelt on either side, dreading to move her, for she seemed now doubly sacred in their eyes.

"Better than that we should never have found her," said Samson, in a broken voice.

"Teddy sure a find her some day. Now fetch a water, and give her drink," exclaimed the black; and taking up what neither of the others had noticed—the milking-pail that the poor girl must have carried from day to day in her many wanderings—he went off and soon returned with water.

"Keep back, fool!" exclaimed Anderson, as the black pushed up to Mary's head, and scooping up some water in the hollow of his hand, he made as if to pour it upon her lips.

"No dead," exclaimed Teddy; "give her drink. Dah!" he ejaculated; for at that moment Anderson gave a cry of joy on seeing a slight quivering in one eyelid, while the thin blue lips parted to emit a sigh, faint as that of the wind above their heads.

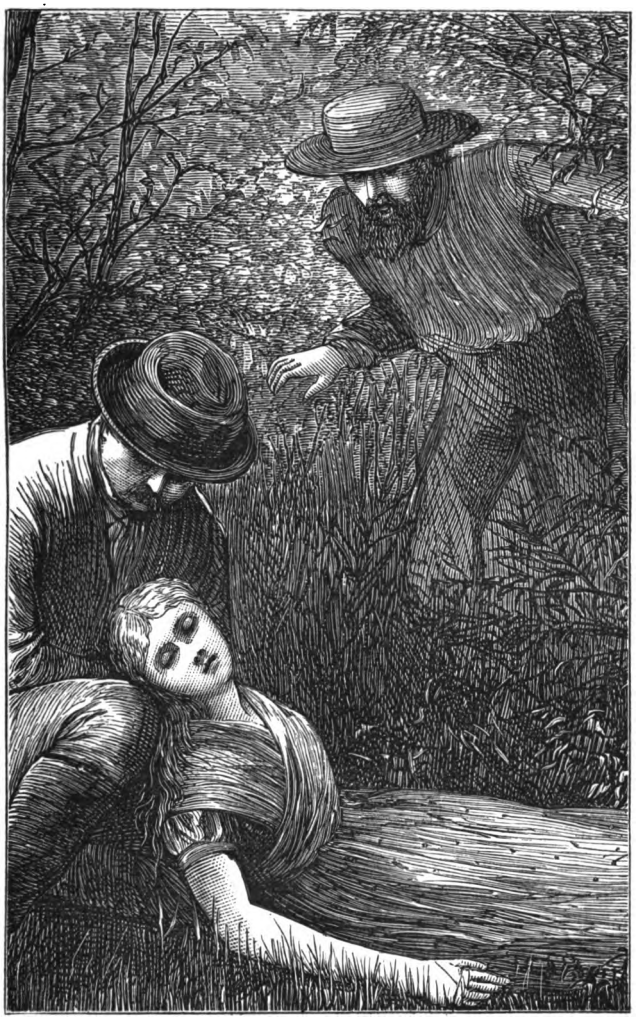
Digitized by Google

They had reached the poor girl in time; but so near had she been to her last breath, that weeks elapsed, during which she lay almost insensible upon the borders of that unknown land to which she had so nearly travelled, before she could be said to be out of danger.

Hers was a simple story—one that she often told in after years to Anderson's children, as, a happy wife, she sat beneath his prosperous roof—a story of how she had finished milking one cow, and was carrying her pail to the next, when the gliding form of a black in his war-paint attracted her attention. Her first idea was to flee to the hut; but that she soon saw was utterly impossible, for figure after figure appeared between her and safety, and all she could do was to back quietly into the scrub, and then, with the pail she carried catching in the bushes, so that the white milk splashed out from time to time, she fled on hastily—always with the impression that she was being tracked.

How it was she clung to the pail always seemed to her a mystery; but it was her salvation, for, utterly worn out at last, she had fallen on her knees in the dense wood as darkness came on, dreading to move, and now for the first time she remembered the milk, and drank eagerly of the remaining but sadly-diminished supply. The next day she wandered on and on, helplessly lost, ever changing her course, and fleeing in dread from the blacks she felt assured were on her trail. The sour milk gave her life and strength that day and the next, and the next, as she husbanded and eked out the failing drops with water, till the time came when all seemed a feverish dream, wherein she was struggling on through thorny wastes, with the hot sun pouring its fervid beams upon her head.

Digitized by Google



THE LOST FOUND—(see p. 243).

Digitized by Google

She knew no more, for her next recollection was of waking in her own old bed at the hut, as from a long and troubled dream, till a glance at her wasted hands, and an attempt to rise, told her that the dream was true.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX.

MY EMIGRANT PATIENT'S FRIEND.

A FRIEND of Samson Harris, whom I met at the old settler's house, gave me the following account of his experience in Australia. He had been a neighbour of the old settler, had prospered as well, and had returned to England about the same time.

I was rather amused at his idea of being a neighbour; for, on asking a question or two, I found that they had lived a hundred miles apart, and only met about once a year, at the station of a settler about midway between them.

The conversation had turned upon the dangers to be encountered in the new country, and among others snakes were mentioned.

"Ah, I can tell you something about snakes, doctor," he said. "We had a singular adventure. It was soon after we had settled out in the up country, and

Digitized by Google

there was only another hut here and there in those days; but, after years of knocking about at home, trying hard to get an honest living and never succeeding, we had made up our minds to try Australia, and here we were, living in the log hut I had knocked up for myself, shepherding, and doing what little I could in the shape of gardening; for, that being my right trade, with all the beautiful rich soil lying fallow, it did seem a sin to me not to have a turn at it; so, getting what seeds I could from Sydney, and adding to the few I had brought in my chest, I managed to make quite a little Eden of the bit of land I broke up round our hut. We were not saving money—not to any extent—but there was a roof over our heads, and no rent to pay, plenty of vegetables of my own growing, and them costing nothing, plenty of work to do, and, one sort and another, always plenty to eat; so that, after what we had gone through in England, you may be sure we were willing enough to try and put up with such inconveniences as fell to our share, and, as a matter of course, there were things to encounter out in what some people would call the wilderness, though it was a wilderness that blossomed like the rose. There were times, for instance, when, like Harris, we were in dread of the blacks, who had done some very queer things here and there about; then the place was terribly lonely, and out of the way if you wanted a doctor; and Mary used to joke me because I could never get half a pint of beer, but I found I could get on just as well without it; and, my word, what a capital cup of tea we always did have!

"Well, Mary came out to me one day looking that horribly ghastly that, being naturally rather too fast at fancying troubles in advance, I saw directly half a

Digitized by Google

score of blacks coming to spear us, and some of them knocking out the children's brains with their clubs—and not the first time neither. 'Harry!' she gasped, in a strange, harsh, cracked voice; and, as I started and looked up from my work, there was my wife coming towards me, with her arms stretched out, her eyes fixed, and a look upon her white face, that made me drop my spade and run to meet her. I caught her just as she was falling, when her eyes closed, and she gave a shiver that seemed to shake her whole body; but in a few moments the poor girl opened her eyes, and began to stare about her. There were no blacks to be seen. Little Joe was sitting in the path playing, and, though I looked along the edge of the scrub behind the house, I could see no signs of danger; so I began to think she must have been taken ill, and turned over in my own mind how I could get any help for her.

"Just then her face grew contracted again as her thoughts seemed to come back, and gasping out once more, 'Harry, Harry,' she gave a shudder and said, 'The baby—a snake!'

"I couldn't see myself, but I know I turned white, all the blood seeming to rush to my heart, for if there is anything of which I am afraid it is a snake, even going so far as to dislike eels, of which there was abundance in the river close at hand.

"I don't know how we got there, but the next thing I remember is standing at the hut window with Mary holding little Joe tight in her arms, and me looking through at the cradle where our little thing of nine months old was lying; and my heart seemed to be turning to ice as I saw nestled in the foot of the cradle, partly hidden in the blanket, but with some of its

Digitized by Google

horrible coils full in sight, and its head resting upon them, the largest snake I had seen since I had been in the country. The feeling was something awful, and I stood there for a few moments leaning upon the rough handle of the hoe I had caught up, not able to move, for my eyes were fixed upon the head of that hideous beast, and I expected every moment that the baby would wake and make some movement sufficient to irritate the snake, and then, whether poisonous or not, I felt that the little thing must die.

"What should I do? I asked myself, as the horrible feeling of helplessness wore off. If I crept in and reached the cradle-side unheard, I dared not chop at the beast for fear of injuring the child, for I could see that some of the folds lay right across it. I dared not make a noise, lest the next moment the child should awake as well as the reptile, for I knew the rapidity with which the horrible creatures could wreathe fold after fold round the object they attacked; while, if of a poisonous nature, they struck in an instant. Thoughts came swiftly enough, but they were unavailing, for to wait till the baby woke, or to go in and attack the snake, seemed equally dangerous. Even if I made a slight noise the danger seemed as great, since, though the snake might wake first and glide off, the probabilities were just as great that the child might wake at the same time.

"And so I turned over the chances again and again, my eyes all the while fixed upon the two sleeping occupants of the cradle, whose pleasant warmth had evidently attracted the reptile.

"'I went in and saw it there,' whispered my wife, and then, without taking my eyes for an instant from

Digitized by Google

the snake, I whispered the one word 'Gun,' and she glided from my side.

"I did not know then, but she told me afterwards, how she had carried the little boy to a distance and given him some flowers to play with, while she crept back to the hut, and, reaching in at the kitchen window, brought me my gun, for I had not stirred. And now, as I grasped the piece in my hand, knowing though I did that it was loaded, it seemed of no use, for I dared not fire; but, with trembling hands, I felt in my pockets to see if there was a bullet in them, and then, softly pulling out the ramrod, I unscrewed the cover of the worm and drew the wadding, reversed the piece, and let the shot fall pattering out, when I softly forced down the bullet upon the powder, examined the cap, and stood ready waiting for a chance; for I thought that the shot might have scattered, and, if ever so little, I might have injured the child in place of its enemy.

"And there we stood for quite half an hour, watching intently that horrible beast comfortably nestled in the blanket, expecting momentarily that the baby would wake, while my hand trembled so that I could not hold the gun steady. One minute I was thinking that I had done wrong in changing the charge, the next minute that I was right; then I fancied that the gun might miss fire, or that I might slay my own child. A hundred horrible thoughts entered my mind before little Joe began to cry out to his mother, and she glided away, while I muttered to myself 'Thank Heaven!' for she was spared from seeing what followed.

"As if at one and the same moment, the child and the snake woke up. I saw the baby's hand move, and

Digitized by Google

its little arms thrown out, while from the motion beneath the blanket I knew that it must have kicked a little. Then there was a rapid movement in the cradle, and as I glanced along the gun-barrel taking aim, there was the whole of the horrible reptile exposed to view, coil gliding over coil as it seemed to fill the foot of the cradle; and now, had my gun been charged with shot, I should have fired, so as to have disabled some part of the creature's body; but with only a single bullet I felt that the head must be the part attacked when opportunity served.

"Glide, glide, glide, one coil over the other quickly and easily, as if it were untying its knotted body, while now the head slowly rose from where it had lain, and crept nearer and nearer to the child's face, the forked tongue darting in and out, and playing rapidly about the hideous mouth. I could see the glance of the snake's eyes, and expected every moment to hear the child shriek out with terror, as the lowered head now rested over its breast. But no, the child lay perfectly still for a few moments, and then I stood trembling in every limb as I saw the snake's head drawn back, and then begin to sway to and fro, and from side to side, the glistening neck of the beast gently undulating, whilst the tongue still darted in and out of the tight, dreadful-looking mouth.

"Now was the time when I should have fired, but I was too unnerved; and laying down my gun, I seized the hoe, meaning to attack the beast with the stout handle; but my hand fell paralyzed to my side as I saw the little innocent in the cradle smile and then laugh at the gently undulating head of the snake; while, as the agony grew to be greater than I could bear, in seeing

Digitized by Google

the little white hands try to catch at it as it swayed to and fro, my power seemed to come back. I snatched up the gun, and as the snake's head was drawn back preparatory to striking, I pulled the trigger, when the sharp crack of the percussion cap alone followed—perhaps providentially, for in my trembling state I might have injured the child. Then I saw a rapid writhing of the coils in the cradle, and as the tail of the snake glided over the side, everything around me seemed to swim, and I tried to catch at the wall of the hut to save myself from falling.

"But that soon went off; and then, gazing in at the window, I tried to make out the whereabouts of my enemy, as I re-capped and tapped the gun, so that the powder might run up the nipple. The snake was nowhere to be seen, and darting in I seized the child, and carried it out to its mother, when, now feeling relieved of one horrible anxiety, I obtained my shot-pouch from the kitchen, rammed down a charge upon the bullet, and cautiously went in search of the reptile.

"I knew that he must still be in the part of the hut we used for a sleeping-place, and, after cautiously peering about, I came upon the hole where it had taken refuge—an opening between the roughly-sawn planks laid loosely down to form a floor. Unless there was an outlet beneath the woodwork, I felt that the beast must be there; and, to make it more probable, there was our cat, that we had bought a kitten in Sydney, gazing with staring eyes down at the hole.

"Just then I heard a soft rustling beneath my feet, and as I looked down, I could see between two boards the scaly body gliding along. The next moment

Digitized by Google

there came the loud report of the gun, the place was full of smoke, there was a tremendous scuffling noise, and as I looked down between the boards where the charge had forced a passage through, there was no sign of the snake.

"'Harry! Harry!' shrieked my wife just then; and on rushing out, there was the beast writhing about in the path, evidently badly wounded, while some crushed-down flowers by the hut wall showed plainly the hole of communication. I never saw snake writhe and twist as that creature did, but I was too excited then to feel afraid, and a few blows from the butt-end of the gun laid it so that there was only a little movement left in its body, which did not stop for an hour or two after I had cut off his head with the axe.

"I should have liked to skin the beast, but I could not master my horror. I measured it, though: fourteen feet three inches long it was, and as thick as my arm; while, as to its weight, I saw the cradle rock to and fro heavily as it glided over the side.

"Snakes are scarce now in that part; for there isn't a man in Queensland who does not wage war against them, and where there was one settler then, there are now scores. But all the same, if I had my time to come over again, knowing what I do, I should not hesitate for a moment if I were not doing well here. Snakes are bad, doctor, and the blacks are worse; but it was a free and healthy life out there, and one always felt as if one was getting on."

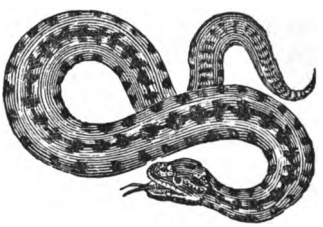
"And not only felt," said Harris smiling, "one was getting on. Yes, I agree with Harry Maine, I'd go out again to-morrow without a murmur; though,

Digitized by Google

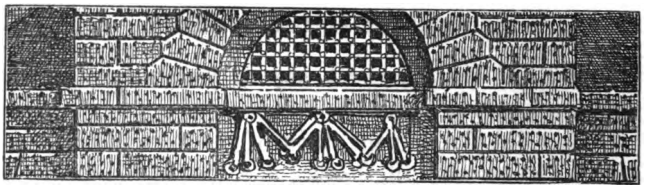
in my time, there weren't any of your sort, doctor, within a hundred miles."

"How did you manage, then, if you were ill?"

"We never were ill, doctor; and few as the medical men were, they seemed to be enough."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXI.

MY PATIENT THE PRISON WARDER.

"TO tell you the truth, doctor," said a grey old patient of mine, "I don't think I was ever fit to be a prison warder: I'm too soft. All the same, though, I've been at it for twenty-five years; and I'm head warder now, and could retire when I like upon a pension. I don't know how I drifted into it, but I did. A dozen times over I've wanted to get into something else, but it has always seemed as if I was forced to stay on for the rest of my days. It's been worse for me because I've always lived in the prison. It's a dull life, perhaps; not that I feel it, for, according to my way of thinking, it is not the occupation, but the man's heart which makes him dull. Depend upon it, hands and a thoughtful mind were not given us for nothing, and the more I think, the nearer I come to

Digitized by Google

the conclusion that the busy life is the happy one after all. Now here I am, with plenty to take up my time in my duties, and plenty of studies of character within reach shut up all ready for me in the different cells.

"Gloomy place this, you'll say, barred and bolted to keep any friends from getting in unasked; but I'm contented enough, and too busy generally to find fault.

"Yes, you may depend upon it your busy man is the happiest, for I've seen it again and again. The greatest punishment you can inflict upon a man is to shut him up with nothing to do, nothing to employ his time with, nothing to hinder the constant drag, drag of his thoughts, pulling him towards the past.

"Not always sorrow and contrition, but recollections of drinking-bouts and successful robberies and their profits, debaucheries, and then longings for liberty once more. Of course, now and then we do get a really repentant fellow—not one of your cringing, fawning rascals, who turn up their eyes and feel so much better for the chaplain's words, and so carefully learn all his texts; but honest rogues—men who have been sent here for their term of imprisonment, and who feel the bitterness and shame of their position—men who shudder as the barber's scissors crop their hair, and who soon show in their appearance how their punishment is telling upon them. They don't get fat and sleek, and jump up to make bows when you enter their cell, but hide all their troubles in their hearts, and go about their duties silently and doggedly.

"We had such a man here not long back now—Amos Ridding, in for poaching—and how that poor fellow beat against his cage bars! Poor fellow! I

Digitized by Google

believe he was not a bad one at heart, but he had got himself mixed up with a poaching gang, and a keeper having been half killed, Amos was taken, and rightly or wrongly sent here for two years.

"We can soon pick out what I call the canters, and act accordingly; while where we see a poor fellow taking his confinement to heart, why, knowing how it tells on his mind, I do all I can for him to brighten him up—setting him at odd jobs about the place, gardening, and so on; while if he knows a trade, one that can be worked at in here, speaking to the governor, we set him to do something in that way, never letting him stand still for tools or material.

"But this poor fellow was unmanageable; he would work as hard as I liked, and as long as I liked, but the moment he was by himself he was pining again, fretting for his wife and children, and wearing himself away to skin and bone. I did not know what to do with him, and grew quite troubled at last, for I began to be afraid of having a summons from one of the under-warders, telling me that in a fit of that weary, despairing madness which comes upon men, poor Ridding had made away with himself.

"The summons came at last, but in a different form; for one morning I was roused at five o'clock to be told that the bird had beaten down the wires, and had escaped, and I had to go and tell the governor.

"'Why, how did he manage it?' I exclaimed angrily.

"'Come and see,' said the warder, and I went to [illegible]ll where the prisoner had been locked in the night [illegible]t eight o'clock, and then apparently he must [illegible]ve to work at once with an old nail at the setting

Digitized by Google

of one of the iron bars in the window till he picked it slowly out, and then wrenched out first one and then another, leaving a passage big enough to allow his body to pass. The blankets and rug were gone, while a piece of the former yet hung to one of the bars, evidently having been used to let the prisoner down into the yard below.

"We were not long in reaching the lesser yard, which was about twenty feet beneath his window, and surrounded on all sides by high buildings. Here it was evident that he had made his way into the long passage between the workshops, a place covered in for the whole length with iron bars. But about half way down we found where he had leaped up and caught the bars, and evidently, by placing his feet against them and forcing while he held on with his hands, strained till the iron gave way sufficiently for him to force his body through, when he would be able to lower himself into the large yard, where the high wall is, whose top is covered with loose heavy bricks, which are sure to fall if an attempt at escape is made.

"Not a brick was out of place, though, as far as I could see, till one of the men pointed out where three had fallen, and then, feeling satisfied in my own mind that the prisoner had escaped, I returned with the governor to his office, and sent out notices to the police.

"All at once one of the men ran in. 'Found him, sir,' he said.

"'How? where?' I said. 'Is he in a cell?'

"'No, sir,' said the warder, 'he's a-top of the prison.'

"I jumped up, and hurried into the yard, to f

Digitized by Google

men at watch, for some people had caught sight of the poor fellow's head from a neighbouring house, and given notice to the gatekeeper.

"It was now plain enough that the prisoner had reached the top of the high wall, and then, probably from its being daylight, been afraid to descend, so he had climbed from thence, by means of a water-pipe, right on to the top of the prison, and was now lying concealed in one of the gutters.

"I sent up three men to the top of the prison, and then went up one of the buildings to see the capture made. I did not have to wait long before first one head and then another appeared above the trap-door, till the three men were upon the roof, which is rather extensive, consisting of high slated ridges, separated by wide lead gutters.

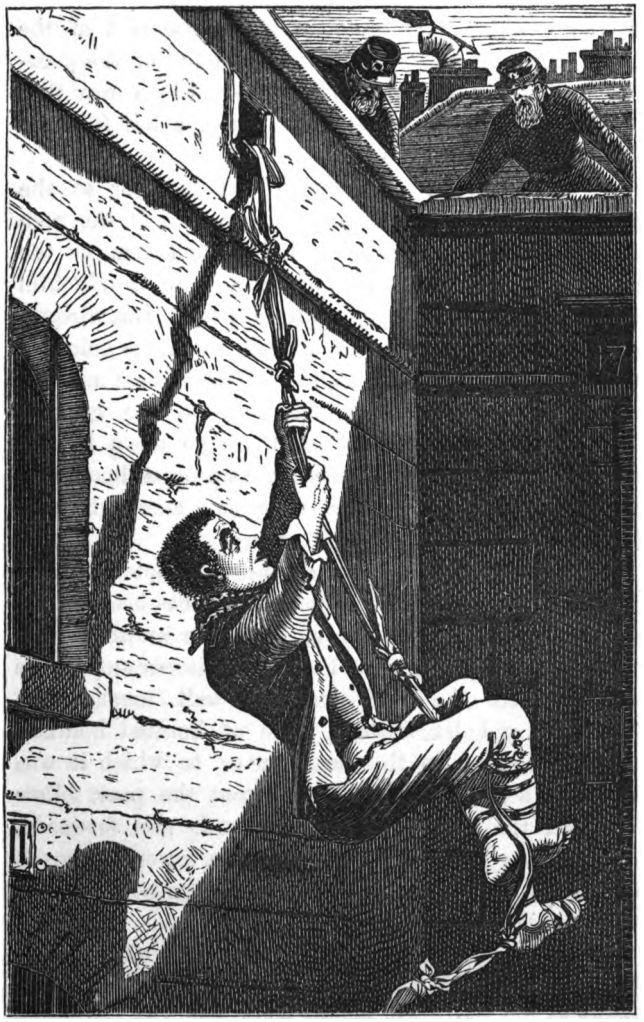
"The noise they made must have aroused the prisoner, for I saw him start up all at once, as if from sleep, and stand facing his pursuers.

"'Of course he'll give up, poor fellow,' I muttered to myself; but I was mistaken, for the next moment I saw him scramble up one side of a ridge and slide down the other, in a way which showed that submission was far from his intention.

"Not to be outdone, the three men separated, and as one followed in the prisoner's steps, the others tried to cut him off right and left.

"But for duty, I felt so much sympathy for the poor fellow, that I should have said, 'Let him go.' But all I could do was to gaze horror-stricken at the scene going on about thirty feet from where I stood. Once a warder was near enough to touch the prisoner, but he eluded the grasp, and led his pursuers right to the end

Digitized by Google



STARING UPWARDS AT THE MEN—(see p. 262).

Digitized by Google

of the building, each man, in the excitement of the chase, running fearlessly along the coping of the parapet, or dashing up and down the ridges in a way that chilled me with horror, as I thought of a fall full fifty feet into the stone-yard below.

"'Thank God!' I ejaculated at last, for at the second race round the building I saw one of the men drop behind a projection in hiding, and then, as the prisoner came round, the warder leaped up, caught him by the throat, and I thought all was over. But directly after I shuddered as I saw a deadly struggle going on within a foot of the parapet, and felt that the next moment must see the pair falling headlong to the ground. It was almost a relief to see them go down heavily into the gutter, and the prisoner leap up and continue his flight, pursued by the other two men, who had lagged behind to cut off their quarry.

"But a new plan was now being adopted by the pursuers, who crawled on hands and knees between the ridges, one going one way, the other another way, while to my astonishment I saw the prisoner stop at the corner where the brick-burdened wall touched the building, and let down a rope of knotted blanket, hitherto hidden in the lead gutter, to which it was somehow secured. The next instant the poor fellow was over the side, swinging backwards and forwards, and turning round and round as he lowered himself quickly, staring upwards at the men, who now came up and looked over at him.

"In that moment of peril I could do nothing but look on, for I felt, I may say, that something was going to happen. My hands were wet, the big drops stood upon my brow, while, when Ridding swung

Digitized by Google

round, and I saw his dilated eyes, I shuddered again, just as the weak-knotted rope parted, and he fell with his back striking the wall, and dislodging some of the loose bricks, when I turned away from the window to run down; but not quickly enough to avoid hearing the sickening crash of the poor fellow's fall upon the hard flags in the yard.

"The doctor was standing over Ridding when I went into his cell, and then, answering my inquiring look with a slight raising of the eyelids and a shake of the head, he went out and left me with the poor fellow, who smiled as I leant over his bed.

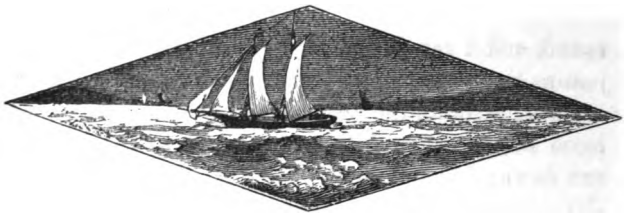
"'Are you in much pain?' I said.

"'Only in one place,' he whispered, touching his breast; and then no more was said for a minute or two, when I spoke a few encouraging words.

"'No use, sir, no use,' he murmured. 'Don't be cross with me. I couldn't bear it any longer. I wanted to be with the wife and little ones once more. Tell 'em how it was.'

"The next morning the poor fellow was free—free from prison bonds—earthly bonds—all; and I was so upset with that affair that I sent in my resignation. It was returned to me with a note begging that I would reconsider my determination: and I did. But we have some most heartrending cases at times."

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXII.

MY PATIENT THE SAILOR.

"WHY, how can you expect to be free from a few pains, old fellow?" I said to a regular ancient sea-dog, whom I used to attend. "Here you've been knocking about all over the world for best part of a hundred years, I suppose, and you can't expect to be fresh and well now."

"Well, you see, doctor," said the old fellow, "that's what troubles me. I'm—let's see—eighty-four, or five, or six—I'm blest if I know exactly; and I've hardly known ache or pain, and it does seem hard, after having a clean bill of health so long, to be having my crew on the sick list now."

"Why, you ungrateful old rascal!" I said, as I saw the mirthful twinkle in the old fellow's eyes. "There, I'll see what I can do for you;" and I did manage to allay the old fellow's rheumatic pains, which in spite of his grumbling he had borne like a martyr.

"I shall begin to think that a sailor's life is the

Digitized by Google

healthiest career in the world," I said one day as I looked at the fine vigorous old fellow, who had all his faculties as perfect as a man of five-and-forty. "You've had your share of adventures, though, I suppose?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I have indeed," he said, combing his thin hair with the waxy end of his pipe.

"Never in the Royal Navy, were you?"

"Oh, yes, doctor, I was not always in the merchant service. They tried to get me more than once."

"What—made you good offers?"

"Good offers, doctor? No, they tried to press me, as they used in those days."

"To be sure; yes," I said. "You lived in the days of the press-gangs?"

"That I did, doctor, bad luck to 'em! Why, let me see, it's as near as can be sixty year ago since we came slowly up the Thames with the tide, and after a deal of hauling, yoho-ing, and dodging, we got the old ship into London Docks, after being at sea two year, and agoing a'most round the world. Sick of it I was, and longing to get ashore, for there was more than one as I was wishing to see and get a word with—folks, too, as were as anxious to get a sight of me; and though a quietish, steadyish sort of a fellow, I felt as if I should have gone wild with the bit of work I had to do, while my mate, Harry Willis, was most as bad. Poor chap! he's been dead and gone now this many a long year: had his number called and gone aloft. A good fellow was Harry, and the rest of that day him and I was knocking about in the ship, coiling down and doing all sorts of little jobs, such as are wanted after a long voyage, when there's a great cargo aboard.

"One day passed, then another, and another, and

Digitized by Google

mighty savage we were at being kept so long before we could get off; but the time came at last, and only just taking a few things each in a handkerchief, we slipped over the ship's side, dropped on to the wharf, and were off.

"Well, being reg'lar old shipmates, you see, it was only natural that we should drop into a little public-house that was down Wapping way, to take a glass or two by way of a treat, and see about a night's lodging where we could be together, as it was quite evening, and we'd some way to go into the country both of us, and meant to leave it till morning. A nice little place it was, close aside a wharf, where the tide came up, and ship after ship—colliers I think they were—lay in tiers, moored head and stern; in short, just such a place as a sailor would choose for a quiet glass and a night's lodging, being snug and cosy-looking. But there, for the matter of that, after a poor fellow's had years at sea, knocking about in the close forks'll of a ship, everything looks snug and cosy ashore.

"It didn't take us long bargaining about our beds, and then, leaving our kits with the landlady, we strolled out and had a walk here, and a walk there, till close upon eleven, when I says to Harry, 'I'm for hammocks, lad. What do you say?' 'Same as you do,' he says; and we turned back meaning to have one more glass o' grog apiece, and then to turn in. It wasn't far to the house, and soon as we got in sight we began to dawdle slowly along, looking at the ships here and there, just seen as they were by moonlight, while plenty of 'em showed a lantern out in the stream.

"'What's those fellows hanging about our place for?' says Harry; for just then we come in sight of a

Digitized by Google

good score of chaps waiting about the outside of the public, while another peep at 'em showed as they were king's men, and most of 'em had got cutlasses.

"'Thought ours was a quiet house,' I says; 'I hope they ain't going to stop about long.'

"'Not they,' says Harry; 'come on.'

"So we went up to the house, and, being first, I was going in, when a tall chap lays a hand on my shoulder, with a 'Come along, my lad, we've been waiting for you.'

"'What?' I says, starting; for just then, for the first time, something shot through me, as it were, and in that short moment I saw all that it meant, and that was, that after years of service in a merchantman we were to be seized by force and dragged aboard a tender to serve the king, whether we would or no; for this party we had come across was a press-gang. But I had no more time to think. Half a dozen fellows had tight hold of me directly, and if I had wanted to struggle, it would have been no use. Harry wasn't so quiet, though. Like me, he had seen it all in a moment, and as one of the gang laid a hand upon him, he dashed it off, cried to me to help him, and the next moment there was a sharp struggle going on—one which roused me to fight; for it was such a struggle as any man would engage in for his liberty in those good old times, when a sailor was not safe if he walked the streets of a seafaring town.

"Harry was a strong fellow, and fought hard; one man went heavily down, then three went down together. Poor Harry was one of them, while a head struck the stones a most awful blow, such as seemed enough to kill any fellow; but it was not Harry's, for the next moment he was up, and before a soul could stop him,

Digitized by Google

he gave a shout, and leaped clean off the wharf where we were, right into the water. Then there was a splash, and you could see the stream all dancing like broken lights where the lamps and moon shone, and then all was still for a few moments, till the officer of the gang called to his men to run down the steps and bring round the boat. 'Hold tight by that one,' he shouted, and the next minute, with some of his gang, he was paddling about on the look-out for Harry, who had never, as far as we could see, come up again to the surface.

"I did not want to run then, but stood still, with the men as held me, looking anxiously out for my poor mate; for it seemed to me then that after all the dangers we two had been through from storms out in the wide ocean, the poor fellow was to lose his life in such a way as this—fighting for his liberty when he was about to be treated like a slave. It's fine language that writers use about Britannia ruling the waves, and our gallant tars and noble seamen, and the deeds they have done, but they never stop to think of the cruelty with which those brave fellows were treated, dragged off to serve the king in a quarrel that they knew nothing about, while after being forced into the service it was death for mutiny if a poor fellow refused to obey.

"Things of the past, these, and times are altered for the better now in the navy; but in them good old times there were black doings, and no wonder there were plenty of mutinies. Here were we, two hardworking sailors fresh home from sea, seized for all the world like blacks, and to be made slaves of for years to come, whilst people were always boasting of the land of the free. Thank goodness, some of those things are better

Digitized by Google

now, and it was time that they should be, for I saw enough of a ship of war in days to come.

"But it was not to be then; for when, after a minute or so, there was no sign of poor Harry, the blood seemed to rise up in my eyes, and in a savage fit of passion I wrested myself from the two men who held me tightly; for I had been standing quiet, and they were taken up with the doings of their mates, and did not expect that I should make a struggle for it now. So I twisted myself free, hit out right and left, and tumbled one fellow off the wharf into the water, and then, before anybody could stay me, I dashed off.

"But I was not free yet, I had to pass the steps, from which two of the gang ran to stop me; but I had good way on then, and as one of them made a blow at me with a cudgel, I came down upon him like a ram, tumbled him over too, and then was racing along the street with half a dozen of the gang shouting and running after me like mad.

"It was a hard run that, up one lane and down another, hard as I could tear, with the hot breath panting out of my chest, and a burning feeling strong on me, as if I'd swallowed live coals. But it was for liberty, and the thought of what would follow if I was caught made me dash on faster every time I felt ready to sink and give in. Whenever I looked over my shoulder I could see one or two of the gang after me, but at last there was only one, and him it seemed as if I couldn't tire out, for there he always was just about the same distance behind, taking step for step with me. We were neither of us going fast now for want of breath, and the perspiration ran down my face; but every time I tried to shake him off it seemed of no use, and every

Digitized by Google

time I turned round to look, there he was still hunting me down like a dog. I tried doubling down a court, but he was close after me; turned down one street and up another, but there he was still; and the more I tried the closer he seemed to get to me.

"Well, this seemed to make me savage, and my teeth got gritting together, and as I knew that he was only one now, having outrun all his mates, and must be as tired out as I was, I said to myself, 'If he takes me, he'll have to fight for it.' Then I ran down another court which turned off to the right again directly after, and then came a horrible disappointed feeling, for I saw that I was in a trap, and when I remembered the cudgel the press-gang man had, it seemed as if my chance was gone, for there was no way out at the bottom of the court.

"People think quickly at a time like this, and in a moment I was hid behind a corner, and listening to the patter of the sailor's feet as he came down the court. Next moment I put all the strength I had left in the blow I fetched him aside his head; down he went with his head upon the stones, and, jumping over him, I ran out into the street and felt that I was free.

"I was sorry for the press-gang chap as soon as I had hit him; but, duty or no duty, the men then were a deal too fond of getting other poor fellows into the same scrape as themselves, and as I felt I was free, my breath seemed to come easier, and I went along the streets at a gentle trot, till I knew that I must be safe.

"I wasn't going to stop in London any more, so I made my way, late as it was, to the Great North Road, and daybreak found me trudging wearily along between the pleasant hedgerows, thinking very sadly about poor

Digitized by Google

Harry, who came from the next village to mine in Hertfordshire, and turning it over in my mind how I should tell his poor old folks about their lad being drowned at home here when trying to get clear of the press-gang. It seemed so hard, and I'm afraid I said more than one queer thing against the king and all his service as I trudged along homewards; but, in spite of all, the morning was so bright and cheery, the country looked so green and sweet, and the birds sang so, that I couldn't feel down-hearted long; while, having no kit to carry, I got fast over the ground, only stopping once to have a good hearty breakfast at a road-side public-house, and early that afternoon I was at home.

"I'm not going to keep you long now, while as to the fuss made over a sailor at home after a long voyage, that's a matter of course. Next day I started off to walk six miles to Harry's friends, to tell them the sad news; and a hard job that seemed, for they were nice old people, and of a better class—the old man doing a bit of farming in his way—and, as he afterwards told me, there was plenty for Harry to do at home, only he would go to sea. 'Poor old chap,' I thought, 'it does seem hard,' and twenty times over I was ready to turn back, for I felt that I couldn't tell the old folks the bitter news.

"Last of all I stood resting on a stile, thinking it over, and going through the whole scene—even seeming to hear the poor fellow's cry as he leaped right into the water. It was only after a hard fight I could wind myself up to the right pitch, when, for fear that my heart should fail again, I ran hard right up to the little place, and walked into the kitchen where the old folks were sitting at dinner.

Digitized by Google

"'News of Harry?' they both cried, jumping up; and then they read it all in my blank face, and the poor old woman was down on her knees sobbing, with her apron over her head, and the old man trying to comfort her. They didn't ask no questions, and the words all seemed to stick in my throat as I tried to speak, and say that, after all, it might not be so bad as I felt sure it was. Last of all, with a regular wail, the old lady burst out—

"'Dead—dead—dead! Oh, my poor—poor boy!'

"'Not this time, mother,' shouted a cheery voice, and I got such a slap on the back as nearly sent me on to my nose, and I says, says I—

"'Well, if that's Harry's ghost he's a reg'lar downright hard hitter.'

"'How did I manage it?' says Harry just half an hour after, as we were all sitting at dinner, except the old lady, who would wait on us, so as she could get behind Hal now and then, and have a stroke at his curly hair—'how did I manage it? why, I jumped right slap off the wharf.'

"'Well, I saw that,' I says.

"'And then I dived till I felt about choked, when I thought I'd rise, and I came up against what I'm sure was the keel of a brig, but I kicked out again and came up t'other side.'

"'What, dived right under the brig?' I says. 'I ain't a marine, Harry.'

"'True as you sit there,' he says; 'and then, as I could hear the gang shouting, I let myself float with the tide down through the shipping; and I got nearly jammed between two schooners. But after a bit I worked myself through, and now swimming, and now

Digitized by Google

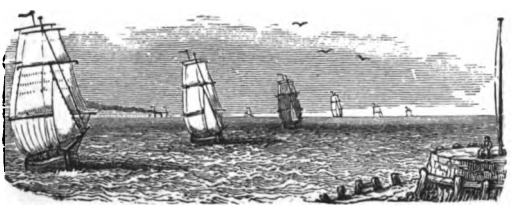
easing myself along by the anchor chains, I got to where there was a landing-place between two great warehouses, and crept up the slippery stone steps dripping like a rat; and then, to tell the truth, I forgot all about you till I'd tramped half way where I stopped and went to bed while my things were dried for me; when I went fast asleep and slept for hours till too late to go on home. And this morning, so as not to be a bad shipmate, I came through Southton village, and told you know who that you was took, for I couldn't face your old people.'

"'You told Lucy as I was taken?' I says, jumping up.

"'Yes,' he says, 'I did.'

"But I didn't wait to hear no more, for I ran out of the house like mad to go and prove that I was not taken, for somehow or another I'd felt too bashful to go to Southton, though I meant to have gone that day; while when I got there Lucy had gone three miles to comfort, as she thought, my old folks. But I needn't tell you any more about that.

"It was a narrow escape, though, for I met several fellows after who were pressed that very night, and it was five years before they got their liberty again."



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

seemed hopeless, a sudden flash or flicker of the expiring flame has renewed hope, and cautiously, and with endless care lest the effort to relieve should result in extinguishing the faint dying light, one has tried again to feed the lamp with oil, the tiniest portion at a time, perhaps feeling a kind of awe as the result has been watched for, and the faint spark has seemed to have been driven forth. Then the flickering has begun once more, grown stronger, sunk, risen, sunk lower—lower, darkness has fallen in the room, and one's heart has sunk in unison with the dying flame—dying? No: that next flash has been more lasting. It was brighter, too. There can be no doubt now. Pour in more oil with tender hand; feed the flickering flame; watch it night and day; no care can be too great; for the enemy is ever on the watch, and a moment's want of attention may result in the undoing of all that has been done. And when at last the lamp of life burns more strongly and the dark shade has fled—vanquished, driven away, there is a triumph, a joy indescribable, which rewards surgeons, or the learned in medicine, alone more than pecuniary recompense or notoriety can compass.

Nothing can be more sad than the feelings engendered when, in spite of all, one's efforts have been in vain; but nothing, on the other hand, can be more purely delightful than the looks of satisfaction and relief in the eyes of wives, parents, children—all by whom the invalid is held dear. If ever gratitude is shown it is then; and the doctor goes away feeling that he has not lived quite in vain.

A hundred pleasant recollections—ay, and a hundred sad ones—have been evoked during the writing out of

Digitized by Google

these notes; while, in turn, my old patients have stood before me, and I have felt the strong, earnest grip of their hands with that heart-felt earnest "Thank you, doctor!" which has meant so much. As I said at the commencement of these pages, I believe in, and esteem the sturdy working man, and for a patient I would wish for none better, on account of his genuine trust and faith in him who is working for his cure. I said, too, that I had once felt a strong desire to become an army surgeon, for the sake of the experience it would give me; but I think I have shown that amongst the privates of the vast army of work-a-day toilers, there is practice sufficient to satisfy the most exacting; and though the surgeon may not have to deal with sword-cut, bayonet, and bullet wound, there is enough work for busy hand and brain at home in his noble profession, whose mission it is to relieve the sick and wounded in the great battle of life.

THE END.

Digitized by Google

Selections from CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.'S

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE.

CASSELL'S SHILLING STORY BOOKS.

All Illustrated, and containing Interesting Stories for Young People,

Price 1s. each.

THE SWALLOW SERIES OF NEW STORY BOOKS.

Magic Mirror, The. By the Author of "Aunt Tabitha's Waifs," and Other Stories.

The Cost of Revenge. By the Author of "Ned Wilton's Victory," and Other Stories.

Clever Frank. By the Author of "Maid Marjory," and Other Stories.

Over the Rocky Mountains. By W. H. G. KINGSTON.

The Ferryman of Brill; and Other Stories. By W. H. G. KINGSTON.

Harry Maxwell; and Other Stories.

A Banished Monarch. By JEANIE HERING. And Other Stories.

Helpful Nellie.

Only Just Once.

The Boot on the Wrong Foot.

Little Content.

Little Lizzie. By MARY GILLIES.

Luke Barnicott. By WILLIAM HOWITT.

My First Cruise. By W. H. G. KINGSTON.

Charlie's Chats about Animals.

The Boat Club.

The Delft Jug. By SILVERPEN.

The Elchester College Boys. By Mrs. HENRY WOOD.

The Little Peacemaker. By MARY HOWITT.

Jonas on a Farm.

Little Pickles. By JEANIE HERING.

Life and Adventures of a Little Bird. By J. WATTS.

The following Books each contain FOUR COLOURED PLATES, and are bound in cloth, lettered :—

Price 1s. each.

The Broken Promise. By the Hon. Mrs. GREENE.

Little Red Shoes.

The Holidays at Llandudno.

The Hop Garden.

Algy's Lesson. By S. E. DE MORGAN.

Ashfield Farm; or, Ellen and Robert's First Journey from Home."

Hid in a Cave.

Little Fables for Little Folks.

Flora Selwyn: A Story for Girls.

CASSELL'S EIGHTEENPENNY STORY BOOKS.

All Illustrated throughout, and containing Stories for Young People.

Published at 1s. 6d. each.

THE FAN SERIES OF NEW BOOKS.

Dick's Hero; and Other Stories. By SARAH PITT.

The Chip Boy; and Other Stories.

Raggles, Baggles, and the Emperor. By CLARA MATÉAUX, Author of "Home Chat," &c. *New Edition.*

Roses from Thorns. By Mrs. A. H. MARTIN, Author of "Into the View."

Faith's Father. A Story of Child-Life in London Byways. By F. M. HOLMES.

By Land and Sea. By S. F. A. CAULFEILD.

The Young Berringtons. By W. H. G. KINGSTON.

Jeff and Leff: The Story of Two Poor City Arabs, and Other Stories. By the Author of "Our Forefathers in History."

Digitized by Google

CASSELL'S EIGHTEENPENNY STORY BOOKS (*continued*).

The following Books each contain FOUR COLOURED PICTURES, cloth lettered, gilt edges :—

Dr. Savory's Tongs.
The Boy who Wondered.
The Little Orphan.
The Story of Arthur Hunter and his First Shilling (Plain Plates).
The Story of the Hamiltons.

The following Books are bound in cloth lettered, gilt edges, with Illustrations and Ornamental Chapter Heads.

Threads of Knowledge. By ANNIE CAREY.
Labour Stands on Golden Feet. Translated by J. YEATS.
Truly Noble. A Story. By Madame DE CHATELAIN.
One Trip More, and Other Stories. By the Author of "Mary Powell."

NEW TWO-SHILLING STORY BOOKS.

All Illustrated throughout, and containing Stories for Young People.

Crown 8vo, handsomely bound in cloth gilt.

Price **2s.** each.

Two Fourpenny Bits. By the Author of "Tiny Houses."
Poor Nelly. By the Author of "Paws and Claws."
Tom Heriot. By EDWIN HODDER (Old Merry).
Through Peril to Fortune. By A. F. LIESCHING.
Aunt Tabitha's Waifs. By the Author of "Little Hinges."
In Mischief Again. By the Author of "Hugh's Heroism," "Nelly's Champion," &c.
Maid Marjory. By the Author of "Little Hinges."

NEW SERIES OF HALF-CROWN STORY BOOKS.

Crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **2s. 6d.** each.

Little Empress Joan. By MADELINE BONAVIA HUNT, Author of "Little Hinges," &c. Illustrated throughout.
Adventures of Working Men. From the Note Book of a Working Surgeon. By G. MANVILLE FENN. Illustrated.
Friends I have Made. By G. MANVILLE FENN. Illustrated.
Golden Days. An English Girl's School Life in Germany. By JEANIE HERING. *New Edition.*
Notable Shipwrecks. Tales of Disaster and Heroism at Sea. By UNCLE HARDY. Illustrated. *New Edition.*
The Wonders of Common Things. By ANNIE CAREY. Illustrated.

CASSELL'S ONE-SYLLABLE SERIES.

Each Book containing Eight Coloured Illustrations, and bound in cloth, gilt edges.

Price **2s. 6d.** per Vol.

Æsop's Fables.
Sandford and Merton.
Reynard the Fox.
The Pilgrim's Progress.
The Swiss Family Robinson.
Evenings at Home.

Digitized by Google

CASSELL'S CHILDREN'S TREASURIES.

A Series of Picture Books for Children, uniform in size and price, each containing 43 Full-page Pictures and accompanying Stories, Poetry, or Music. Square crown 8vo, cloth, **1s.** each.

Simple Rhymes for Happy Times.
Tuneful Lays for Merry Days.
Cheerful Songs for Young Folks.
Pretty Poems for Young People.
The Children's Joy.
Pretty Pictures and Pleasant Stories.
Our Picture Book.
Tales for the Little Ones.
My Sunday Book of Pictures.
Sunday Garland of Pictures and Stories.
Sunday Readings for Little Folks.

CASSELL'S CHILDREN'S LIBRARY.

All Illustrated, and bound in cloth, gilt edges.

Price **3s. 6d.** each.

The Children's Album. Containing nearly 200 Engravings, with Short Stories by UNCLE JOHN. 368 pages, cloth gilt.

Children's Sunday Album, The. By the Author of "A Trap to Catch a Sunbeam." With upwards of 150 Engravings.

Hymns and Poems for Little Folks. *Uniform with "The Children's Album."* With numerous Illustrations. Super-royal 16mo, 320 pp., cloth.

Playing Trades. By HERACLITUS GREY. With Sixteen Illustrations printed in Colours.

The Story of Robin Hood. With Eight Coloured Plates.

The True Robinson Crusoes. A Series of Stirring Adventures. With Twenty Full-page Illustrations.

Off to Sea. A Story for Boys. By W. H. G. KINGSTON. With Eight Illustrations printed in Colours.

On a Coral Reef. By ARTHUR LOCKER. Handsomely Illustrated.

The Old Nursery Rhymes; or, The Merrie Heart. With Eight Full-page Coloured Plates from Designs by WALTER CRANE, and 100 Illustrations.

THE COSY CORNER SERIES.

A Series of Story Books for Children. Each Book containing nearly ONE HUNDRED PICTURES. Fcap. 8vo, cloth gilt, gilt edges.

Price **2s. 6d.** each.

Little Chimes for All Times.
Wee Willie Winkie. By C. L. MATÉAUX.
Bright Sundays.
Pet's Posy of Pictures and Stories.
Dot's Story Book.
Little Talks with Little People.
Bright Rays for Dull Days.
Chats for Small Chatterers.
Pictures for Happy Hours.
Ups and Downs of a Donkey's Life.

THE GIRL'S LIBRARY.

Heroines of the Mission Field. By Mrs. EMMA RAYMOND PITMAN, Authoress of "Vestina's Martyrdom," "Profit and Loss," &c. Illustrated throughout. Crown 8vo, patent morocco, 5s.

Better than Good. A Story for Girls. With Four Full-page Illustrations. By ANNIE E. RIDLEY. Patent morocco, 5s.

Jane Austen and her Works. By SARAH TYTLER. With Steel Portrait and Steel Title. Patent morocco, 5s.

Digitized by Google

Tim Trumble's "Little Mother." By C. L. MATÉAUX. With 18 Illustrations by GIACOMELLI. Extra fcap. 4to, cloth, gilt edges, 5s.

The Favorite Album of Fun and Fancy. Illustrated throughout by ERNEST GRISET. Crown 4to, cloth, 3s. 6d.

Little Folks. The Half-Yearly Volumes. Each containing COLOURED FRONTISPIECE and nearly 500 Pictures. Extra crown 4to, coloured boards, 3s. 6d.; cloth gilt, 5s. each. LITTLE FOLKS *is also published in Monthly Parts at* 6d.

Little Folks' Painting Book. A Series of Outline Illustrations by KATE GREENAWAY, adapted for Water-Colour Painting, with Descriptive Stories and Verses by G. WEATHERLY. Price 1s.; cloth gilt, 2s.

Little Folks' Black and White Painting Book. With Illustrations in Black and White, and Amusing Verses. 1s.; or in cloth, 2s.

Little Folks' Nature Painting Book. With numerous Illustrations, intended for water-colour painting, of well-known British Flowers, Butterflies, Birds, and Animals. 1s.; or cloth gilt, 2s.

Pictures to Paint. With numerous ORIGINAL COLOURED PLATES, with accompanying Outline Engravings intended for Water-colour Painting. Extra fcap. 4to, in coloured wrapper, 1s.; or cloth gilt, 2s.

The Old Fairy Tales. Edited by JAMES MASON. With numerous Original Illustrations. *New Edition.* Coloured boards, 1s.; cloth, 1s. 6d.

The Wonderland of Work. A Book for Young People. By C. L. MATÉAUX. With numerous Original Illustrations. Extra crown 4to, 320 pp., 7s. 6d.

What Girls can Do. A Book for Mothers and Daughters. By PHILLIS BROWNE, Author of "A Year's Cookery," &c. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

Through Picture Land. By C. L. MATÉAUX. Containing about 200 Illustrations. Fcap. 4to, cloth gilt, gilt edges, 3s. 6d.

Little Folks' Picture Album. Containing 168 Large Pictures, with accompanying text printed in bold type. Cloth gilt, 5s.

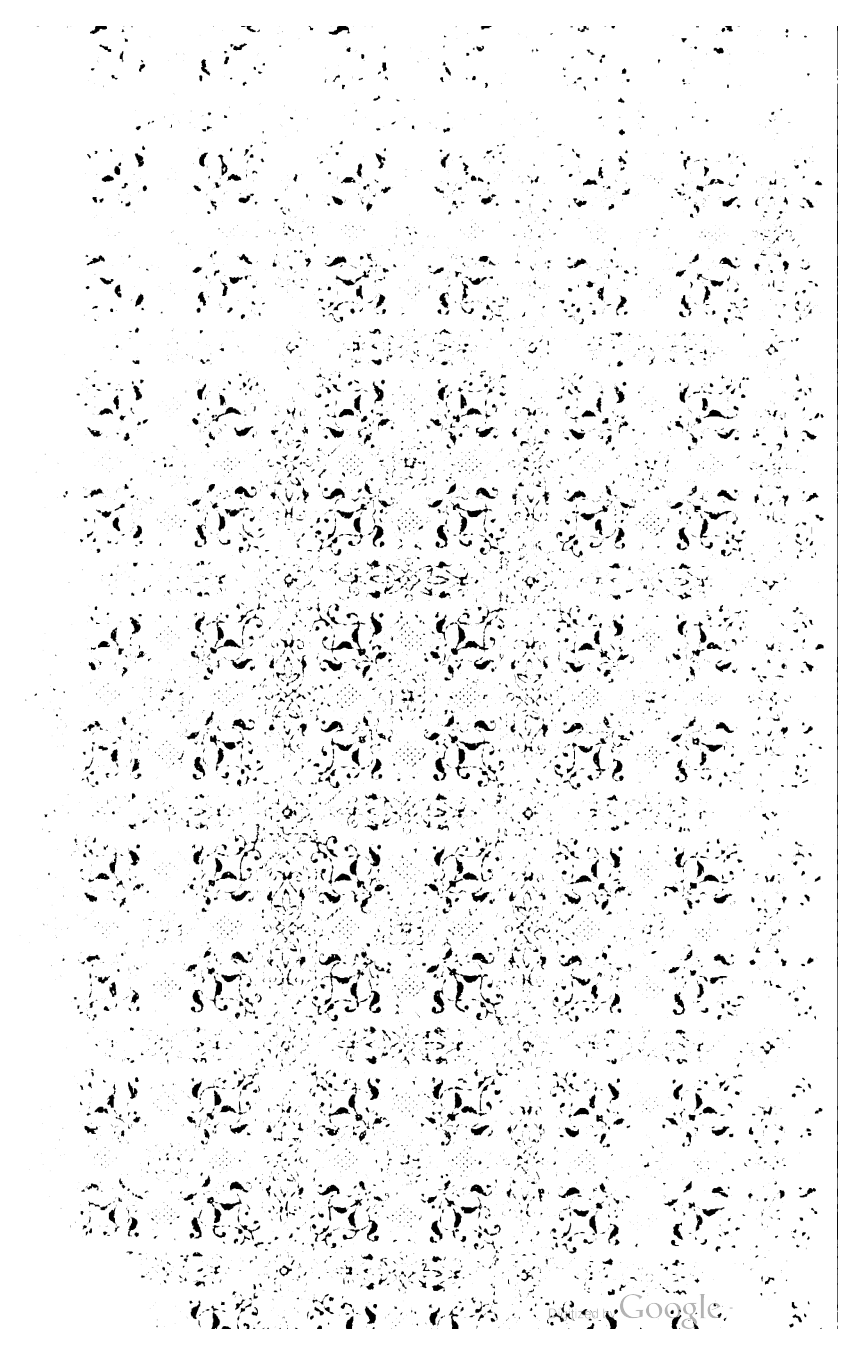
Tiny Houses and their Builders. By the Author of "Poems Written for a Child." Profusely Illustrated. Cloth gilt, 5s.

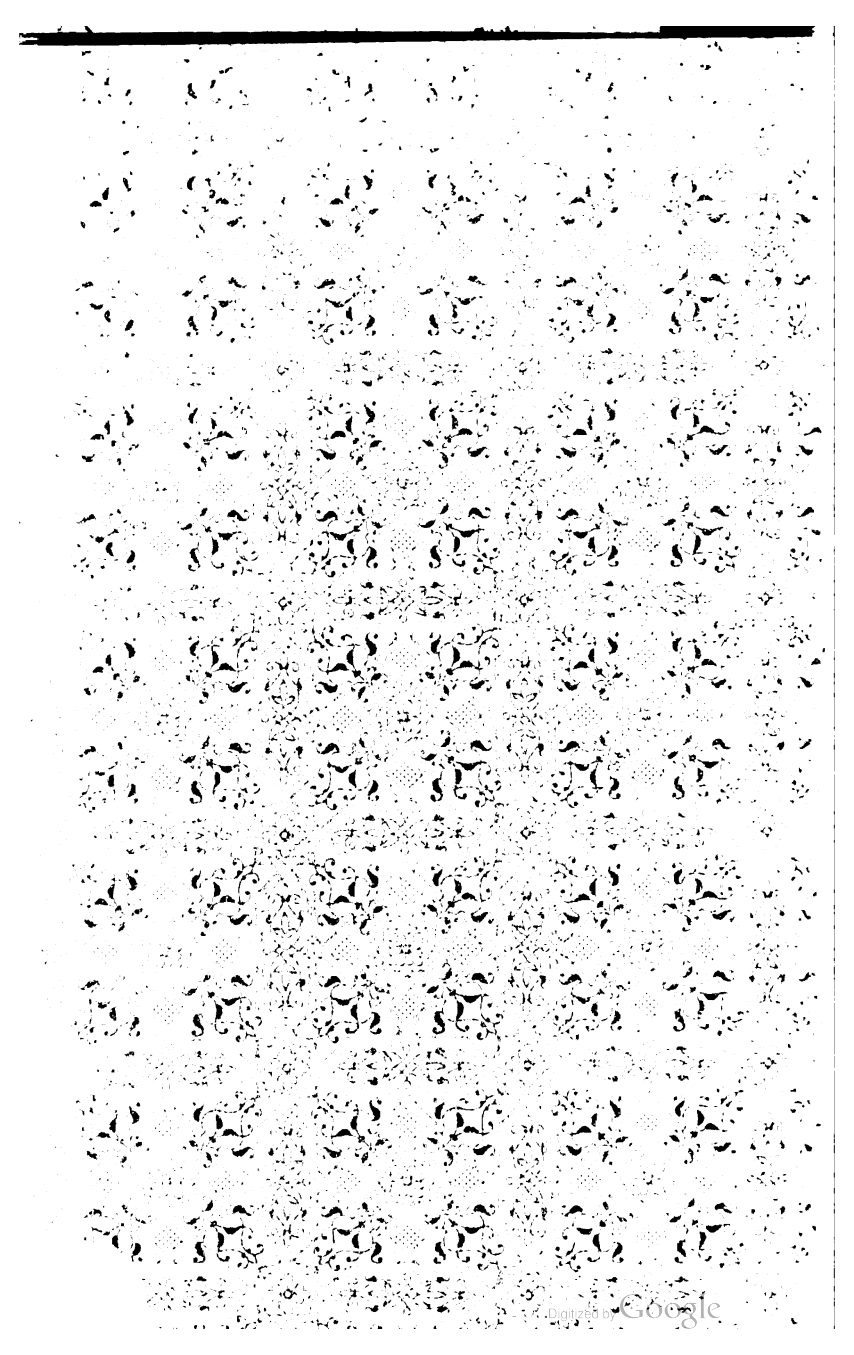
Around and About Old England. By C. L. MATÉAUX. With numerous Illustrations. Extra fcap. 4to, cloth gilt, gilt edges, 5s.

Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co.'s Complete Catalogue, containing a List of *Several Hundred Volumes*, including Bibles and Religious Works, Fine-Art Volumes, *Children's Books*, *Dictionaries*, *Educational Works*, *History*, *Natural History*, *Household* and *Domestic Treatises*, *Handbooks* and *Guides*, *Science*, *Travels*, &c. &c., together with a Synopsis of their numerous Illustrated Serial Publications, sent post free on application to CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO., Ludgate Hill, London.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Google

£20 A YEAR

MAY BE EASILY SAVED

By a judicious use of JUDSON'S

Useful! Household!! Necessities!!!

WRITE FOR PAMPHLETS (post free).

JUDSON'S BLACK-ALL.

An Enamel Varnish for Stoves. 6d. and 1s. per Bottle.

JUDSON'S GOLD PAINT.

For Renewing Picture Frames, &c. &c. 1s. 6d., 3s. 6d., and 10s. 6d. per Bottle.

Judson's Mahogany Stain.

6d. per Bottle. By simply adding boiling water a splendid Stain is produced, which will not rub off. A 6d. Bottle makes One Quart of Mahogany Stain.

JUDSON'S HOUSEHOLD REQUISITE.

JUDSON'S HOUSEHOLD REQUISITE consists of a pretty fancy tin box with lid and handle, containing a bottle of Cement of Pompei for mending china, glass, &c., a bottle of Soluble Glue for mending all kinds of woodwork, and a bottle of Superior Gum for sticking in scraps, &c. The box is made to hold hot water, to dissolve the cement and glue, and altogether JUDSON'S HOUSEHOLD REQUISITE is one of the most useful articles introduced for many years.

PRICE 1s. 6d. COMPLETE.

Carriage paid to any part of the United Kingdom on receipt of Postal Order or stamps, 2s. Under any circumstances do not fail to *write for pamphlet* containing much *valuable* and *useful* information.

JUDSON'S DYES,

6d. to 5s. PER BOTTLE.

IMPORTANT.—If you cannot procure what you require of your Local Tradesman, send Stamps to the Proprietors—

DANIEL JUDSON & SON,

77, SOUTHWARK STREET, LONDON, S.E.

Digitized by Google

CASSELL & COMPANY (LIMITED), BELLE SAUVAGE WORKS, LONDON, E.C.